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Cultural Intersections: White Teachers and Their Racial Minority Students

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Cultural Intersections: White Teachers and Their Racial Minority Students

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Michelle. She sacrificed of herself when I could not. Her selfless acts kept a young family thriving. I also dedicate this project to Caleb and Will Pritchett, my two sons.

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I fell in love with learning at Armstrong Atlantic State University in 1993. I have been in college pretty much since that time. Many individuals have supported the culminating moment of that journey. First, I would like to thank my mother, Shelby Pritchett Pearson, for her support and her financial wherewithal to make it happen. She always believed in my education. In addition to my mother, Bill and Debbie Harrison have supported me every inch of this journey. My family would have crumbled without their gift of time and food. Thanks for Wednesday nights and everything else.

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL INTERSECTIONS: WHITE TEACERS

AND THEIR RACIAL MINORITY

STUDENTS

by

Jason Pritchett

Racial minority students in American public schools learn in environments that are antithetical to their cultural and familial backgrounds. Because the majority of the teacher workforce is comprised of white teachers, the institution of school places racial minority students at risk. These students drop out or are labeled as failures at alarming rates. This qualitative study explored the teaching behaviors of white veteran teachers through a design that mixed both multicase study and autoethnography. The data sources for this study included interviews, focus groups, teacher journals, and teacher-authored documents. The data in this study was member checked and peer reviewed as well as triangulated to increase accuracy. Three findings were gleaned from the data: (1) white teachers in this study teach from a worldview that demonstrates a monolithic cultural gaze; (2) when white teachers are inclusive of other cultures, they inadvertently impede the progress that might occur from such inclusiveness by poor planning or by other life events; (3) the subtle relationship between power and assessment allows white teachers to unintentionally impact their racial minority students. Recommendations for teachers of English include culturally relevant pedagogy and reflective pedagogy as a means to provide racial minority students a voice in the classroom. Further research is needed to evaluate racial minority student percep-

tions of white teachers and their myopic instructional strategies for the diverse students within their classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Vignette 1: The Crucible

Today's lesson worked last year. What's so wrong with The Crucible *anyway? It's a play about the corruption that power brings. Thematically, this is a universal concept—it applies today just as much as it did when Arthur Miller wrote it. Many of my students weren't impressed. Heads went down as soon as I read the rather lengthy description of Reverend Parris' upper room. Arturo had to go to the bathroom; Kiara and Ashley started talking immediately. Ivy pulled out her cell phone to text. When I asked her what was so interesting about her cell phone, she replied that she had to text her mother because soccer practice was cancelled today due to rain. Generally, I use this play to spice up the Puritan period. Plainstyle, historical narratives, and captivity narratives aren't my cup of tea either, but this information has a bearing, even though it might be slight, on the End of Course Test and the Georgia High School Graduation Test. I can't exactly skip this time period. Their graduation might depend on it.*

What was it Patricia said when I told her I was teaching The Crucible*? She said she doesn't teach the play because she feels like the one representation of minorities in the play is negative. Patricia is right in many ways. When she told me this, I thought about Tituba. Tituba, Reverend Parris' slave from the Barbados, is flatly portrayed by Miller, and she is, though I'm not sure if it is a historically accurate depiction of her, blamed by Abigail Williams for being a witch. Ostensibly, Tituba's culture—she is from the Barbados we are told by Miller—connects*

her to voodoo, so she is a great candidate for Abigail to attack. Even negative depictions of race provide discussion points, right? If I take Patricia's statement to heart, does it mean that the paucity of minorities in the literature book is equally damaging as the minorities portrayed in a negative light? The resources of our school are limited, and I cannot imagine getting the green light to buy materials that provide the positive portrayals seen in other works. We are often told to work with what we have. Puritans are difficult to relate to admittedly, but witchcraft is interesting and the Salem Witch Trials are full of lessons for students to consider. Surely, my students would be able to relate to the major topics of the play? For example, we learn about the dangers of theocracies and the difficulty of getting along with neighbors as well as the legacy of witch hunts in this country. During today's lesson, it was clear that my students did not find these topics interesting.

So, a real question is whether or not I continue with the writing assignment I had planned for this week. I have to finish the play because I do not want to give up on the idea that my students might glean something from the play. Some of them most certainly will end up liking the final scene. For the writing sample, I plan to have the students write a persuasive essay, explaining whether or not they agree with John Proctor's decision to die in order to keep his good name intact. Surely, my students will think this is interesting. They know about names and the importance of names being attributed or not attributed to certain actions. Just the other day, in fact, Antwon told Chelsea in class that he did not have anything to do with what happened on the bus. Even though Antwon might be proclaiming innocence to not get in trouble, he seems sincere enough to make Chelsea leave him alone. Clearly, he recognizes the value of having a clean name. We could finish the play by Thursday and start working on the essay by early next week. This assignment will meet several standards and help students work on the persuasive

skills for the GHSGWT. My prompt could be something like this: "Discuss whether or not you agree with John Proctor's decision to be hanged. In your response, you should consider what this means action means for his family and his reputation in the town. Within each paragraph, please make an assertion and back that assertion with evidence in the form of textual support. Your response should contain an introduction with a clear thesis and a definitive conclusion."

I begin with this vignette to demonstrate my own struggles with teaching racial minority students[1]. For me, the problem is not usually one of motivation. I desire to do what is best for all of my students, but I find that it is extremely tempting for me to worry more about time periods in literature and testing. In general, I also assume that I know the interests of my students and that they are similar to mine. More times than not, I sift this interest through my own literary indulgences or my favorite high school and college texts. Even though I am writing a dissertation and conducting a study on how teachers work with racial minority students, I still struggle with the tension between what I call my default teaching methods and the teacher the literature on this topic shows me I need to be. In my default mode, I turn out of familiarity to Hemingway instead of Sandra Cisneros. Hemingway and I have a long relationship. We have been to Africa and Paris together, and we have both laughed heartily at Fitzgerald. We also agree that Faulkner may have thought a little too much of his pregnant sentences and his literary experimentation. Cisneros is nice, but she is not an old friend yet. Hemingway is just that, and I know all of his best stories.

In my dissertation, I broaden the literature base on the topic of white teachers and their racial minority students, and I expand my own thinking. I am in transition as a practitioner, and

[1] I define the term racial minority students in the section of this paper entitled "Definition of Terms."

oftentimes, I struggle with finding resources outside of the curriculum that represent the diversity of my classroom. During these times, I fall back on the familiar books from my years as an English graduate student. Even though I am white and deal with my own issues of white guilt[2], I try to incorporate my students' familial and cultural lives into the lessons I create.

Many times, though, as the above vignette notes, it takes a colleague to make me reflect upon my own actions. I am not alone in this regard. Through informal discussions with other teachers who are also white, I have learned that similar conflicts as well as internal struggles with white guilt occur in other schools and classrooms at my school. Conversely, I have learned through conversations over beer and at school football games that some of my colleagues do not struggle with pedagogical decisions involving race. As a result, they spend little time thinking about culture when they prepare to teach to the diversity in their classrooms.

During the course of my dissertation study, I realized that the number of colleagues who did not believe that race was an issue in their classes exceeded my estimation. These observations coincided with the timing of my study nicely, and the reason they were so salient was that I was in research mode. If I had not been reading numerous articles about culturally relevant pedagogy and observing classes, I would not have noticed with such acuity the disregard for racial minority students in my particular teaching environment. In break rooms, classrooms, and hallways, I informally observed teachers exhibiting behaviors that often disregarded the diversity of the students in their classrooms.

A few months before I began my study, I deliberately chose the course of my study. I wanted to research teachers instead of students because I was interested in how teachers see their racial minority students as well as what choices they made to teach those students. Because I

[2] I write about this idea in more depth in the second vignette and the "Origination of the Study" section of this paper.

foolishly believed that all of my students should love Hemingway as I do, I wanted to know what about my myopic classroom focus hindered the racial minority students in my class.

This dissertation study is both autoethnography and a participant-driven qualitative examination. Over the course of the fifteen-week period, I took the stance of both participant and researcher (and oftentimes a hybrid of the two). Early in the planning stages of my study, I recognized the importance of qualitative research in providing context to the phenomena of the classroom (Merriam, 2009). I also understood that qualitative research embraced autoethnography as a legitimate investigative tool. In this case of this study, I used autoethnographical techniques to underscore my story as a white teacher because these techniques are an important way of knowing the world (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Long (2008) notes that autoethnography "…places the self within a social context by using introspection as a tool to turn the focus onto his/her emotional experience" (p.189). This was the aim of the autoethnographical vignettes I composed as well as the other creative pieces that begin the thematic subsections of Chapter 4.

Throughout the course of this qualitative study, I attempted to relay the stories of the participants, and I utilized them in conjunction with my own story to provide a collaborative narrative that illuminated the story of white teachers and their struggles with racial minority students. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) observe that the role of autobiographical writing is to assist the audience in understanding life as it is lived, and my autoethnographic lens focuses on how the self is situated in socio-cultural contexts, embraced these precepts. This study examined the lived experiences of teachers who teach racial minority students in an American high school. Our collective story informed the literature on this topic.

The Research Questions

Racial minority students attend schools that oppose their strengths as individual students. For example, schools with diverse populations are more likely to have an imbalance of educational resources as well as unqualified teachers. Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) reiterate these points, noting that racial minority students and people of color receive the least amount of assistance from qualified teachers. In addition, diverse populations within schools are more likely to clash with the primarily white ethic of American schooling and score lower on standardized tests (Hilliard, 1997). While it might be controversial to suggest that school systems operate under a different set of values than many of its students, the research on achievement gap literature proves that America schools often fail its racial minority students (Dekker, Krou, Wright, & Smith, 2002). In America, access to social and cultural capital is granted to the cultural majority, especially those with the benefit of not being marginalized by the institution of schooling (Delpit, 2007; Kushamiro, 2009).

Universities and teacher preparation programs underprepare their students for the diversity of the American school and create a larger problem in public schools by not equipping pre-service teachers with knowledge and experience about what diverse learners need (del Prado Hill, Phelps, & Friedland, 2007). This dissertation does not address that discussion thread directly. The limitations of this study, however, address the relevance of that particular discussion for future research. I focus specifically on the topic of veteran teachers who are in the field, using their expertise to reach the students in their classrooms. Moreover, I address the intersection of racial minority students with their white teachers. To research this particular topic, I designed the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of white privilege on racial minority students in the school setting?
2. To what extent do white teachers activate the cultural and familial experiences of racial minority students?

Definition of Terms

In this study, I use the term *racial minority* and other terms such as *whiteness*, *culture of power*, and *privilege* because these terms are present in the literature on the struggle of racial minority students to succeed in American schools (Delpit, 2007; Howard, 2007; Hughes, 2008). While these terms are important to the study, there are many connotations and denotations of each of these words. Because word meanings change within different contexts, a clarification of terms is necessary to expound upon the meanings I gleaned from the literature.

Racial Minority Students

While *racial minority* is a term that has a myriad of meanings in different contexts, I use the term *racial minority* to mean those who have identities that are antithetical to the dominant cultural narrative of whiteness (Wise, 2008). Racial minority students are from an "… environment [which] happens to put them at risk of academic failure" (Beneke & Ostrosky, 2009, p.3). The home environments of racial minority students are opposed to the dominant narrative of whiteness in America. One reason for this opposition is that racial minority students are often linguistically different and do not use Standard English (SE). They come from ethnically rich backgrounds and different non-standard dialects are the primary basis for communication. In this study, a person of color is one whose cultural background, familial heritage, and linguistic patterns are at odds with the institutional representation of schooling as it currently exists in America. Because of the hegemonic power of White ideology in American

schools (Hyland, 2009), racial minority students are also those whose educational opportunities have been usurped by racist reward structures within the educational system. Delpit (2007) suggests that racial minority students exist outside of the culture of power in American schools. Furthermore, racial minority students often do not yet have the tools to succeed in the racist system of American education.

Whiteness

Whiteness, as I use it, refers to the racial designation that offers an explicit connection with systems of power that have been traditionally opposed to "otherness." Carter et al. (2007) defines whiteness in these terms:

> Whiteness is a hegemonic system which perpetuates certain dominant ideologies about who receives power and privilege. Whiteness maintains itself in culture through power dynamics within language, religion, class, race relations, and sexual orientation, etc. (p.152)

Whiteness is access and, to a larger degree, connection to entrenched social structures that reward a set of values at the expense of other values, cultures, and languages (Hyland, 2005). A benchmark for deciding who does and does not have access to other systems of institutional and social power, "…whiteness is intimately linked to the subordination and oppression of people of color" (Hyland, 2005, p. 431). As a concept, whiteness is a socially constructed and institutionally maintained way of being that is upheld in the American public school system. In that white privilege is visible systemically in a variety of forms to those who are oppressed, it is invisible to whites (Green, Sonn, & Matsebula 2007; Hytten and Adkins, 2001). Whites, therefore, do not recognize their impact on those they oppress, and this inability to be aware of

whiteness as it exists in relationship to minorities in the classroom makes its impact more powerful than white teachers often understand.

Privilege

I align *privilege* with *whiteness,* though, admittedly, one may be born into privilege and not be considered white. Too often, these two terms are used synonymously, but *privilege* specifically speaks to a type of entitlement negotiated at the school level (Giroux, 2004). This entitlement is not attained by all whites, and often individuals of different races gain access to financial and social capital, which garners privileges within societal frameworks. This study, however, suggests that whether one is born into an entitled position, white culture has the advantage of offering access both politically and socially. The institution of whiteness in America grants this access to its cardholding members, as it is a socially constructed idea of the majority (Adair, 2008). Regardless of socio-economic status, whiteness offers the ability to pass culturally into dominant ideological spaces without repression or social retribution. Through passing, whites have opportunities that other ethnic designations do not have. Whiteness offers invisibility on many levels, but in situations in which schooling is involved, whiteness often offers the privilege of not being labeled as defective or in need of academic remediation (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ellmer, 2010). Therefore, whiteness grants privilege in the form of power, social capital, and the ability of economic choice.

Vignette 2: Jamal

I am thinking about Jamal. As I remember Jamal, he was a young man who was talented and confident. He had a big smile and would walk into work and give hugs to all of the older women on our shift. In the back of the kitchen making salad like she did every Friday night, Mrs. Ruth would frown hard and act like Jamal's hug meant nothing, but she loved it. We all could

tell that she loved Jamal. I can't say that he was the son she lost to Atlanta because she never told me that, but I do know that she went to church with Jamal's grandmother. She was tasked, "…to look after that boy."

Jamal and I are the same age. Jamal is black and I am white. Jamal went to the public school in my neighborhood, and I went to the private school thirteen blocks away. We lived on two different sides of Victory Drive in Savannah, Georgia. On Jamal's side of this four lane lined with palm trees, the houses were large, but they had long since been divided by a landlord into smaller apartments. Each house was cut into three or four apartments, depending on the layout of the house. Many of these older homes had once belonged to Savannah's old wealth. Whatever money and social capital adorned this side of the street had long disappeared by the time I met Jamal. On my side of the street, older homes existed as well. Whereas Jamal's side of the neighborhood was filled with minorities, my side was white. Even though two blocks separate our houses, our worlds could not have been more different.

What sticks in mind most about Jamal is how hard he worked in the kitchen at the same restaurant that employed me. Working beside me on most Saturdays, I couldn't help but notice how difficult it was to keep up with him. He could keep the grill going and remain on top of the fry orders, dishing out orders seconds before employees would ask him for them. The next moment he was in the back getting lemonade. Perhaps the job that I hated meant more to him, or maybe he was just a better worker. Either way, Jamal deserved the promotion that I received in July of 1992. Promoted to shift leader, I had not worked at the restaurant as long as Jamal, and I had not demonstrated the devotion or the work ethnic to the chicken business that he did.

I am convinced now that Jamal was not promoted because of skin color. Our boss was white and our company was very conservative at the time. I met a certain employee profile that

Jamal could never meet. I went to school with the boss' daughter and worshipped at his church. Even though I didn't know the boss's family well, I got the job because I was clean cut enough and white enough to be the face of the company in the evenings. Jamal never said anything to me about my promotion, but shortly after my promotion Jamal left the job. I never saw him again, and I cannot help but wonder what Jamal saw in this situation. My boss continued to promote in a similar manner for other shifts, and I don't know that I really thought about it too much until Jamal moved to another place for employment. As a white employee, I can't help but think that the system was primed for me. I am white, Christian, and even though I was in high school at the time, I knew the people and places my boss knew. I had currency—clean-cut and polite. Jamal didn't fit the right criteria because he was black and traveled in different social circles. For all of the remarkable similarities between the two of us, there were some notable differences. Even though I don't think I was completely aware of these differences, some people definitely were.

Origin of the Study

This study represents the culmination of years of thinking, struggle, frustration, and understanding. While I accept my role in failing racial minority students in the public school system, I also realize that my failures as an educator began with my privileged upbringing in private schools and my access to a powerful social and cultural inheritance I never questioned. The above vignette shows I was groomed by social norms that I freely accepted. Jamal found himself on the other side of these social norms.

Since Jamal, I have found myself discussing the importance of equality in America many times. The most poignant of these conversations occurred in 1997 in an African-American literature class. Throughout the course of this discussion, I felt conflicted as racial minority

students in my class discussed power structures I had never encountered. As they discussed their antagonistic relationship with whiteness, I remembered Jamal. Had I caused pain to minorities as well? What privileges did my single white mother really have? These questions ran through my mind during this weighty discussion. My internal conflicts were uncomfortable but formative in my understanding of my place in the larger racist legacy of America. These conflicts were formative to my development of my teaching philosophy and this dissertation study.

A Note about White Guilt

The company that Jamal and I worked for was very traditional, and I fit the mold as a white male that Jamal did not fit. I believe the company liked me because I saw others like me receive the same treatment. Time and time again, social promotion came my way throughout the earlier years of my teenaged working life. I was vaguely conscious of being promoted above others at the time, but I lacked the confidence and self-awareness to articulate fully what I saw with my eyes. At the time, I was 17 and still immersed in the self-perceived importance of my life. I would be lying if I did not admit to sometimes having guilt over what happened at the restaurant where Jamal and I worked. Even though it has been years since these event took place with Jamal, I still battle with the reality of what his experience meant and continues to mean.

The vignettes of Patricia and Jamal reflect my own vacillation between what Helms (1992) poignantly describes as a continuum of racial understanding. Helms mentions that whites and their understanding of race change. For Helms, this continuum involves six stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependence, immersion, and autonomy. In the pseudoindependent stage, white individuals begin to understand the way they have contributed to racist institution; and in the immersion stage, white individuals begin to search for accurate information about race in order to understand their own socialization. I fit between these stages

much of the time, and this dissertation is evidence of my desire to continue to grapple with the stages Helms delineates. For me, these stages are not firm demarcations. At times, I am more aware of the institutional workings of racism and power as they inform privilege, and on other days, I do not exhibit racial awareness.

Even though I still feel guilty about the situation with Jamal, I continue to attempt to understand the social ladder that unfolded before me during my collegiate years. I know I did nothing other than hard work to deserve the college scholarships awarded to me. Across the city of Savannah, many students were working harder and overcoming greater odds; yet, I was pocketing money to attend a university that I never really desired to attend. How many disadvantaged students would have jumped at the chance to attend college? In my mind, I see the events that have led me to today as an endless processional of opportunity and safety nets available for my edification. I see choice and advantage in my wake, and I feel a tinge of sadness when I think of the world that has opened for me and not for others.

This study is largely my acknowledgment and attempt at the rejection of this reward known as social capital. As a teacher, I find it difficult to teach the culturally relevant manner in which Esposito and Swain (2009) champion. For me, obstacles exist at every turn. Time, money, culture, and improper training lead me to an impasse. Time, specifically, impacts my pedagogical practice on two fronts. First, I am eleven years into my profession, and I am only now beginning to understand truly the negative impacts that my teaching has had on my diverse students over the years. I teach what I know, and I have failed students for not knowing or caring about the material that I have presented. Instead of reaching the students through more representative cultural avenues, I ask them to meet me where my worldview begins and ends. I am solipsistic in my curricular choices. Oftentimes, I am forced to choose what is timely and

important for my students, and the path of least resistance is unfortunately the most comfortable for me. This scenario generally occurs with certain authors such as Charles Dickens, for example. Even though I view the poetic words of Julia Alvarez as important, my choices demonstrate something different. Because I know Dickens intimately, I choose Dickens over Alvarez because Dickens requires less research and less planning on my part. I often view ethnically diverse expressions as secondary to my canonical comfort zone. Under any circumstance, this is laziness on my part and poor pedagogical practice. More to the point, it is disrespectful of the opportunity for all of my students to learn and utilize their personal capital in the classroom. Even when I am aware that I am making the wrong choice for my students, I still do make that choice and assign the piece of literature that I know they will despise because they cannot connect to *The Scarlet Letter*. I tell myself my choices are about survival, but I think they really are more about power. I have the power in my own classroom to facilitate growth for all of my students. Oftentimes, I intentionally choose the latter.

Additionally, the paucity of resources my school possesses in terms of culturally diverse reading material is limited. Textbooks, books, and posters in English classrooms do not reflect the increasing diversity of Topeka High School, and the influx of individuals of color into the In-School Suspension (ISS) room further suggests that my school is out of touch with its growing diversity. Teachers are not trained or encouraged to accept other ways of expression from racial minority students. Both physical and emotional expressions from minorities are undervalued. Students of diversity are often treated as outsiders because of educational policies, and they often feel unwelcomed in environs where they are consistently being told that what they look like and how they act are inappropriate.

Inside the majority white classrooms of my school, when issues of race occur or when I want to read texts from ethnically different writers, many of my students—both white and black—put their heads down. In my experience, this disengagement occurs primarily because students feel the awkwardness and intensity of racism. They are tired of talking about race, and many of the white students see it as unimportant. The issue of race brings out such sensitivity among the participants. I have had students tell me that the reason for the rolled eyes and the suggestive body language is that race still impacts individuals. When a white student, for example, suggests something about an African-American student that might be making fun of them, harsh words quickly become a reality. Thus, tensions still exist within the classroom along the racial divide.

Again, I am in transition—learning and examining. There are ways to reach all of the students in my classroom. I just have not discovered how to do so each and every day within the framework of the limited time and resources I possess. Furthermore, I worry that my drive to do so has been quenched by the excuses I am sometimes willing to accept. My study illustrates my desire to understand the context in which racial minority students learned and my desire to make a difference in the way they learned and what they learned. As a white male, I have a role—perhaps a vantage point—that offers insight and maybe even access to the students in my classroom, but I am also ever mindful that even well-meaning white teachers may be unaware of their own racism (Chubbock, 2004).

Writing as Relevant

Banks (2006) acknowledges that multicultural educators—those seeking to place culture at the forefront of their classroom—impart democratic values to their classrooms by seeking to

> …improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action that will help make our nation and world more democratic and just." (p. 145)

This quote implies a human agency that aligns itself with the term *social justice* or *equity pedagogy.* Teachers who utilize this agency in the classroom and encourage their students to see the larger context in which they exist diversify the worldview of their students and promote democratic understanding. To make the world equitable, teachers assume a personal responsibility when they become social justice educators (Applebaum, 2004; Otunga, 2009). In the American public school, teachers might begin to accept personal responsibility for social justice by allowing students within their classrooms a method of carving space within the dominant culture mentality of the classroom (Rodesiler, 2010). Adolescence is confusing enough, Beamon (2001) argues, without a space to explore and express feelings and desires. The classroom can be an appropriate place for such exploration.

In the discipline of English, writing offers teachers the opportunity to help students understand their place in the larger settings of the classroom and their communities. For example, Hill (2009) found that when teachers exhibit standard and non-standard modes of expression in their compositions students feel as if they belong and take chances in their own writings. Dutro, Kazemi, and Balf (2004) point to an increase in writing curriculum and student opportunities to write about personal topics as important factors in identity development. They further suggest that the narrowing of the writing curriculum because of standardized testing has the opposite effect. Writing instruction can be a transformative act as it has the ability to allow students to define their own identity against the other external factors seeking to define them (Heyman, 2004). In this regard, writing has the capability to open avenues for social justice

(Jocson, 2008; Camangian, 2008). This study examines the possibilities of writing for social justice as an opportunity for students to express their own individual stories against the larger backdrop of the dominant culture narrative.

Summary

Hollywood has long romanticized the idea of teachers being the equalizer of social and economic inequities (Pruitt, 2007). Films such as *Dangerous Minds* reflect this romanticized view. Though not a realistic depiction of the classroom, such films often embrace the white savior myth. Typically, this formula involves a white teacher, who is often female, going into a classroom and saving the racial minority students from their deprived cultural and familial environments. Although this formula is cliché, it does arrive at one truth. The teacher is the greatest difference-maker in the classroom, and often that teacher comes from a different ethnic background than do the students in the classroom. This study underscored the need for white teachers to acknowledge their impacts—both positively and negatively. By acknowledging that they had a social capital and that capital is often a hindrance during the learning process for students of diverse backgrounds, educational practitioners make a positive step forward (Banks, 2006).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last ten years, achievement gap literature has documented, in a copious fashion, the negative correlations that exist for students who have both a low SES and a racial minority background (Pungello et al., 2009; Cammarota & Romero, 2006). This gap in achievement is exponentially impacted by other stressors at work in urban and rural environments where a lack of resources and quality trained teachers are factors in the quality of education that racial minority students receive (Farkas, 2002). Those who need quality teaching the most are least likely to reap its benefits (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Environmental variables—single parent homes and poverty to name two—have more than a tangential influence on achievement as well (Barton, 2004; Evans-Winters, 2005). Federally mandated testing further exacerbates the issues that racial minority students face as teachers and students feel the pressure to perform and to improve test scores, often at the expense of what research documents as good pedagogical practice (Amreim & Berliner, 2003; Hilliard, 1997).

While researchers have long been aware of the inequities in the American education system, they have had difficulty documenting a positive change in terms of test scores over the past decade. Despite awareness of achievement gaps, Darling-Hammond (2010) notes that the achievement gaps measured between ethnic groups are still significantly incongruent. Howard (2003) further discusses the academic underachievement of African-Americans and Latinos in schools, stating that it has been abysmal for decades. Moreover, poor test scores lead to negative associations for racial minority students and "gross errors" (Hilliard, 1997,p. 87) in the

testing arena. These errors include, for African-American students, a numerical misrepresentation of mental ability, speech, language, and reading ability. Probst (2005) suggests another downside to the testing environment for racial minority students who perform below average:

> They will suffer the boredom of long hours taking standardized tests, the loss of instructional time consumed by test preparation, and they'll lose out on books which might have been purchased with money now being directed to corporations producing and scoring the tests and analyzing the data. Worse, they'll suffer from the reduction of the curriculum to something measurable. (p. 62)

The impact of testing is significant on the ability of racial minority students to perform inside and outside of the classroom.

Even if researchers could discard the body of research that explicates the problematic nature of minorities and standardized testing, they would still have to contend with the classroom itself. As an environment for learning, the classroom is not neutral because the classroom embodies the biases of its inhabitants. Kumashiro (2001) notes that the classroom is a place where racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism play out in schools. Ladson-Billings (2009) eloquently describes Kumashiro's observations of the modern classroom with the following metaphor: "The typical modern classroom is also an ecological system. It matters how many students are present, what proportions are of a particular racial or ethnic group, what first language students speak, and what their prior schooling experiences have been" (p. 97).

The biases of the classroom teacher have a great impact. Bartolome (2004) reiterates the above observations, stating that teaching is a task that has implications for instruction in the classroom:

> Given the social class, racial, cultural, and language differences between teacher and students, and our society's historical predisposition to view culturally and linguistically diverse students through a deficit lens that positions them as less intelligent, talented, qualified, and deserving, it is especially urgent that educators critically understand their ideological orientations…(p. 98)

Other than teacher bias, the cultural mismatch between student and teacher stands as an obstacle to student learning. This cultural divide can be difficult for teachers to navigate, and the impact of such a mismatch points to a demographic divide between students' racial and ethnic make-ups and that of the majority of teachers, who are still mostly white, female, and middle class (Hodgkinson, 2002). The cultural misalignment in the classroom can have negative consequences for students from culturally diverse homes (Hughes, 2008; Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Barton, 2004).

Theorizing Whiteness

Educational inequities in America are often defined by race, and two polarized groups generally define this dynamic: white and not white. Power relationships within schools and classrooms exist (or do not exist) according to this polarization. Standardized tests and other demographic questionnaires often ask for racial affiliations without asking white people to signify their racial identity—i.e., Irish-American and other hyphenated origins are not considered to be data that researchers or test graders can properly use. Thus, whiteness is not categorized while other racial and ethnic categorizations are. Because of this invisibility, white individuals have trouble seeing themselves as racial beings (Howard, 1999). In America, whiteness offers a type of invisibility, both socially and culturally. Other racial categorizations are, therefore, systemically defined by not being white, de-emphasized, and labeled as they appear in contrast to

whiteness. This contrast is reiterated by popular culture media outlets, schools, standardized tests, churches, and spaces where people are socialized and influenced by subtle and overt messages to think certain ways about ethnic affiliations (Dorfman and Schiraldi, 2001).

In concrete terms, Lopez (2003) suggests that the racial formation process in America occurs on two levels. In the first level, Lopez suggests that macro-level processes have an impact on shaping the identity of individuals. These processes are situated in the larger institutions of society. Schools, businesses, and churches are such institutions where these interactions occur. According to Lopez, the micro-level, a place where personal encounters occur, involves the social interactions in society between peers and non-peers in a mall. Within these two levels, people of color—non-whites—are stereotyped and portrayed in the cultural discourse of America as racially different than white and negatively delineated as violent, ignorant, or sexually deviant. Importantly, Lopez argues that these public racial representations "…become 'controlling images' that are used to justify contemporary policies regarding urban youth, criminal justice, and education" (p.25). Teachers often view their understanding of race through these misrepresentations. Lopez suggests that school policies are created to categorize and label students, especially students from diverse backgrounds, based on these images. McLaren (1989) calls the unintended impact of this institutionalized negation of students from different backgrounds one of the hidden curriculums of schooling.

In America where the myths of equality are perpetuated by institutionalized acceptance of norms, whiteness still provides an in-group, a type of social capital that grants mobility and understanding (Hyland, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Howard, 1999). Applebaum (2007) observes that whiteness provides privilege that is predicated upon "…the unjust exclusion of others" (p. 456).

African-American and Latino students labeled as special education students or as being at-risk of failing out of school are greater in number than their white counterparts (Howard, 2003).

Teachers and Whiteness

Teachers who claim to be racially colorblind are unlikely to understand race and even more unlikely to respond to situations when racially insensitive acts occur. Pedagogically, the colorblind worldview enforces stereotypes and has a negative impact on student learning. Furthermore, this viewpoint can have drastic consequences; inaction is a serious issue that often breeds violent outcomes in schools (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). These outcomes do not have to be violent, though. Discussing whiteness in schools, Wise (2008) notes that whiteness opens doors that are closed to other ethnic groups. By looking at his own advantages in schools in *White Like Me*, Wise delineates a powerful argument for the subtle, but powerful, hegemony which exists in schools today:

> To be white at that school, as in most schools, was to have the world of extra-curricular opportunity opened to oneself—a world where if you were a mediocre student (as I definitely was), you could still find a niche, an outlet for your talents, passions, and interests in the form of theatre. To be black or brown at that same school was to ensure that no matter how good an actor or actress were, ore were capable of becoming, and you were unlikely to be in a position to avail yourself of this same outlet for your creativity. (Wise, 2008, p. 30)

Admittedly, Wise's book is not a research project or a study, but his observations are supported by a body of research that nature of how white teachers see their ethnically diverse students.

Hill-Jackson (2007) lists, for example, three important stages white teachers encounter: the unconscious stage, the responsive stage, and the critically consciousness stage. In the

unconscious stage, white teachers "…have anesthetized worldviews" (p. 30). That is, they did not recognize the validity of other worldviews in the classroom. When in the responsive stage, white teachers become curious about cultures and hegemony in the classroom. Recognizing validity and truth in multicultural life experiences and willing to be critical practitioners, teachers enter into the critical consciousness stage. This stage invokes feelings for the importance of understanding the different realities and acting pedagogically on those realities in a shared classroom experience (Wise, 2008). Similarly, Helms (1995) found that white racial identity evolves in six stages, and like Hill-Jackson (2007), she notes how these stages represent an evolution. In the contact stage, Helms found that whites were oblivious to their whiteness and its impact, while in the disintegration phase, whites demonstrate conflict over their position as part of the majority. Whites assert that they are more dominant than blacks or other minorities and accept that dominance as part of the way the world operates in the reintegration phase. For Helms (1995), understanding whiteness and helping other whites understand minorities occurs during the pseudoindependence stage. Finally, the immersion stage allows whites to redefine their whiteness while the autonomy stage promotes the redefinition of a non-racist whiteness. Howard (1999) reiterates the claims of Hill-Jackson (2007) and Helms (1995), noting that white individuals overcome racism by entering three distinctly different stages. In the first stage, they acknowledge the reality of whiteness and the privilege which this position allows. In the latter stages, they abandon racism and develop non-racist positions, and consequently, they must reformulate their own identities as well as how they respond to situations in which racial injustice occurs.

Even in the continuum that Hill-Jackson (2007), Howard (1999), and Helms (1995) suggest, Hyland (2005) observes that white teachers may have false perceptions of where they

belong along the continuum. In a study of four white teachers, Hyland found that racism and bias occur in teachers who consider themselves culturally aware. Carmen, a subject in Hyland's study, noted that she did not think she needed to make the curriculum culturally focused on certain groups because the state-mandated curriculum was depoliticized and neutral. This misunderstanding of curriculum's political nature speaks to the unconscious and systemic pervasiveness of the promotion of the status quo, which often unintentionally promotes injustice in the school environment.

Wise (2008) acknowledges that it is unlikely that white power structures can be easily removed for two reasons: 1) There is a paucity of white role models carrying the flag of systemic reform; 2) White privilege assists whites, and dismantling a system which safeguards stereotypes, status, and other indicators of power is counterintuitive for whites. Sheets (2009) suggests that the journey of being a teacher from a dominant culture mentality is difficult and arduous if one wants to be truly equitable within the classroom. In the case of the dominant culture, the fear of giving up power might be the greatest obstacle to dismantling hierarchies that promote racist pedagogical practices (hooks, 1994).

Critical Pedagogies: An Overview

Much of what exists in the literature for critical pedagogy is often misaligned with multicultural education and misunderstood by teachers in the classroom as multicultural education. Castango (2009), for example, notes that six different typologies exist in the literature of cultural pedagogy. These typologies provide for an understanding of multicultural education, and they exist as the following: assimilation, amalgamation, pluralism, cross-cultural competence, critical awareness and social action. Education for assimilation suggests, as Castango points out, that the education of multiple students from different cultures should

include assimilation to the dominant culture. This is the "…business as usual model" for schools (p. 43). In this framework of understanding cultures, students are regarded *en masse* not as the culturally unique individuals they are. Thus, education for amalgamation seeks to emphasize commonalities across groups in order to reduce prejudices that arise in the classroom. Pluralism, in contrast, highlights the differences between groups to provide a place "…where diversity is valued" (p. 45). Taking pluralism one step farther, educating for cross-cultural competence involves student's being able to function within their own culture and in the cultures of others. This type of functionality in multiple cultures provides social understanding and mobility to celebrate the differences of culture within a school setting.

Castango (2009) mentions critical awareness and social change as his final two typologies. These two paradigms are the most related to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and they validate and affirm student culture and identity by seeking to develop a critical consciousness in both the child and the teacher. Social change promotes awareness and demonstrates how students can be agents of change. Critical awareness and social change are intertwined and form the basis of critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy as Theoretical Pedagogical Stance

The field of critical pedagogy would not exist if the theoretical underpinnings which upholding the practice that it seeks to invoke had not been laid by a group of German philosophers and writers who used Marx's theories to establish a school of thought that examined society's substructures in the 1920s. Because these thinkers were located in Frankfurt, Germany, they were aptly named the Frankfurt School. These writers—Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse, to name a few— universally

voiced the idea that transformation could happen for the masses if critical reflection and education were part of a new tradition in the West (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009).

When the progressive thinker Paulo Freire published the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he took the principles of the Frankfurt School and turned them into questions specifically directed toward pedagogical interactions. Looking at agency and voice for the marginalized, Freire's writings reiterate the early concerns of the Frankfurt School, and the conglomeration of both the Frankfurt School and Freire's work lay the foundation for thirty years' worth of writing in the field which focus, as McLaren (1989) notes, on a world that has asymmetries in power; thus, critical pedagogy assumes that knowledge is constructed in a nexus of power relations. Consequently, critical pedagogy, as McLaren defines it, is "…fundamentally concerned with understanding the relationship between power and knowledge" (p. 72). Critical pedagogy examines these power relationships to understand the outcomes and impacts of power in the classroom.

In addition to setting the framework for critical pedagogy, Freire defined the terms for critical pedagogy as a pedagogical stance. Looking at the oppressor and the oppressed in the classroom, he noted that a dialogue must exist between student and teacher. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argued that this dialogue must not be along the lines of the banking concept of education, a term he is responsible for coining. When teachers teach in the vein of this banking concept, they assume that students are vessels, which can be filled with knowledge. They oppress those they teach, Freire argues, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (p. 159). Freire argued that this type of educational model increases control in the classroom in favor of the teacher.

In this sense, Freire desired to end the teacher-student dynamic as it existed, creating a more egalitarian dynamic in which the role of student and teacher existed simultaneously in the classroom. McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur, and Jaramillo (2004) argue that such a dynamic can completely revolutionize education if one realizes that the classroom is political:

> Completely revolutionizing education does not depend upon the great white men that capitalist education teaches us are our presidents, heroes and role models. It relies upon the broad masses of people recognizing that the whole system is worthless and must be transformed to reflect their interests. This is the strength of a revolutionary critical pedagogy, that it is an orientation of fighting for the interests of the multi-racial, gendered working class and indigenous peoples all the way through. (p.150)

Delpit observes that racial minority students in a classroom must fight a "…culture of power" (p.25). That is, the classroom is an environment where standardized testing, textbook companies, and teacher as well as student agendas—both conscious and unconscious—have the potential to influence learning. Power is thus located in the norms of the classroom and the school building (Delpit, 2007; Applebaum, 2004; McLaren 1989). Jackson (2007) notes that critical pedagogy aims to encourage "…transformative action and empowerment of students, acting as a site for struggle and the development of praxis" (p. 209). Critical pedagogy underscores the interaction of these power relations, asking teachers to be critical of their power in the classroom and the way that power manifests itself through their pedagogical practices. In short, critical pedagogy promotes an institutional awareness of hegemonic forces. The goal of such awareness to provide teachers with the tools to impart power to students.

Similarly, Lynn and Jennings (2009) suggest that critical practitioners make schools contested spaces, places that do not simply embrace dominant culture ideologies. Instead, they

are spaces where oppression by majority culture ideologies co-exists with a reflective desire to question pedagogical motive as well as the learning processes of students. Thus, teachers who wish to practice critical pedagogies need to promote democratization (Giroux, 2004). To be effective, Giroux continues, pedagogy can never be seen as a fixed set of principles; instead, in a disciplinary sense, it must be contextually defined and continue to question whatever political, economic, or social norms arise.

Teachers and their pedagogical practices are the most researched aspect of critical pedagogy, more so than even curriculum design (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Much of the literature points to teachers' critical reflections as a necessary component of critical pedagogy's success. Hughes (2008), for example, notes that Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP), an arm of critical pedagogy, must involve several tenets. Teachers who claim they use CRP, Hughes contends, must recognize the intersection of oppressive constructs other than race while noting that race is endemic. Additionally, CRP practitioners must understand the power dynamics in schools and emphasize the importance of exploring cultural places within society as well as pedagogy and learning in their classrooms. Through autoethnography, Hughes observes that he, an African-American professor, and a white pre-service teacher in his class both learned to disrupt assumptions that they made about one another through journaling and discussions about race. Practiced carefully and thoughtfully, critical pedagogy necessitates change in the pedagogical strategies of teachers; and from a disciplinary standpoint, critical pedagogy demands that teachers interrogate their relative positioning within society as well as that of their students.

Social Justice and the English Classroom

Creating an institutional structure in which such teaching occurs takes critical pedagogy a step farther into the realm of social justice pedagogy, which suggests that a certain moral agency

must accompany critical pedagogy. Social justice pedagogy looks at the ethical implications of not acting in a classroom or school setting (Applebaum, 2004). In Freirian terms, critical pedagogy and social justice pedagogy cannot change the educational system without a calculated subversion of the system and the willing help of the oppressor (or teacher). This clear negation of the banking system of education, as Freire (1970) defines it, is ethically just for students. Using a socio-political critique of institutions that perpetuate wrongs, Young (2006) examines the important link between structural injustices, which critical pedagogy acknowledges, through a sociological lens: "…structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institution goals and accepted norms" (p.13). Structural inconsistencies must become the moral imperative of social justice agents if change is to occur; additionally, Young's model notes that individuals are responsibility when they do not act with moral agency to reduce the injustice of the dominant ideology.

In the English classroom, the choice of literature selections and of pedagogical strategies utilized to deliver curriculum standards of writing and reading perpetuate inequities and stereotypes of race, gender, and sexual orientation by either addressing these issues or by ignoring them (Kumashiro, 2001). The English classroom, then, is a complicated crossroads where the interplay of the culture and the community of the student encounter the teacher's belief systems about language and acceptable linguistic signs in the classroom environment. In the English classroom the teacher defines literacy and what is valued in the setting; therefore, the teacher decides what is written, read, and communicated even if it is antithetical to the student's social and communal literary experiences (Cushman, Barbier, Mazak, and Petrone, 2006).

Choice is, therefore, power in the classroom, and because teaches make choices, they send messages about what should and should not be valued.

Forming a socio-cultural definition of literacy, Gee (1996) notes that literacy is formed through interaction and interplay, which he purposefully calls this "Discourse." For Gee, this capitalized term reflects the broader nexus of interactions that occur when Discourse is social and cultural, not just a conversation between peers or casual relations. Thus, a social-cultural definition of literacy is linked to identity in the school, the classroom, and the home. Any devaluation of student literacy has negative impacts on school performance and literary self-efficacy. Cultural identity is also impacted by classroom devaluations. Public schools, administrative staffs, school board employees and, to a greater extent, federal legislative mandates concerning schools not only ignore the students in the classroom from an ethnically or racially rich background, but these institutional bulwarks also ignore the family literacy from which the student gains his or her earliest understanding of what words and texts mean. This repudiation of the student at the school level and this negation of who the student is at home denigrates literacy experiences and turns the classroom away from a place of possibility into a scripted commercial for marginalization. Teachers who teach from a social justice perspective understand the importance of giving students power. For racial minority students, this power comes from the teacher's ability to carve spaces that can be utilized to discuss the issues in their community or their lives.

Family Literacy

Because family literacy has a drastic impact in the classroom, it is, therefore, integral to any understanding of a student's literacy practices. Clearly defined, family literacy is a pivotal aspect of child literacy development (Duch, 2005; Sink, Parkhill, Marshall, & Norwood, 2005;

Smith, 2008). All too often family literacy, as Taylor (1997) notes, is delineated as a universal construct—an implication that suggests implicitly that family literacy treatments or interventions fall into a one size fits all approach. Part of the underlying issue involved with the universal treatment of family literacy as a limited-pattern quilt is that researchers often attempt to define the issue of family literacy as a socio-economic issue or an issue facing a racial minority group without looking at the individual cultural strengths and understandings of the families involved. This de-emphasis of family is apparent in achievement gap literature where many researchers focus on the element of poverty and its well-documented connection with poor student achievement among minorities (Pungello, Iruka, Dotterer, Koonce & Reznick, 2009; Eckhert, 2008). As Taylor notes, a family's literacy might not be deficient; the family may operate in a literate fashion that suits cultural norms that are different that the valued literacy of schools.

Because of the variety of cultures in the American classroom, schools that want to reach the students from different backgrounds should begin to examine the home literacy of these students and make strong connections with the families (Barton, 2004). These connections are vital for student learning. Taylor (1997) offers in his decade old, but anticipatory collection of literacy essays, a revised definition of family literacy. Instead of embracing the negativity of the monikers dropped on low achieving parents and their low achieving children, Taylor argues that a new literacy definition should include culture as an asset for teacher's to use in the classroom. Taylor's redefinition includes the family and the student, and it should, from a social justice perspective, include the family on an integral level.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The English classroom offers clear navigable tributaries for helping students create textual documents (or read textual documents), which honor both individual Discourses, as Gee

defines them and familial discourses as Taylor defines them, while simultaneously allowing for a critical investigation of attitudes about racial minority culture and the dominant culture. Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to amend the injustices caused by the dominant white narrative of the classroom by creating a space for students to impart their own family and culture. Esposito and Swain (2009) define the term, *culturally relevant pedagogy* as a pedagogical state of mind which "…draws on students' home cultures as a mechanism for helping them achieve success in school" (p.38). They further note that culturally relevant pedagogy shares commonalities with social justice pedagogy in that practitioners who use these pedagogies care about their students.

Cushman et. al (2006) note that an analogous term *culturally responsive teaching* seeks to make pedagogy congruent and meaningful for all students in the classroom. In addition, culturally responsive pedagogy should improve the educational outcomes for students of color (Gay, 2010). Sheets (2009) discusses how Diversity Pedagogy Theory (DPT), a pedagogical stance which pushes culturally responsive lessons, allows teachers to develop culturally responsive lessons systematically by working on eight non-hierarchal pedagogical behaviors that are sensitive to racial minority students. These pedagogical behaviors include a culturally safe classroom and culturally inclusive content which acknowledges the existence of a home culture. Freire (1992) shows fidelity to the ideas and intent of culturally relevant pedagogy in his later works, remarking that educands, the individuals receiving the education, deserve respect: "…their speech, their way of counting and calculating, their ideas about the so-called other world, their religiousness, …must all be respected " (p. 72).

Standardized Testing and the Culturally Relevant Composition

In a time when adolescent writers are composing documents with great frequency in digital formats, schools struggle to maintain student interest in the act of composing (Soiferman, Boyd, & Straw, 2007). The high stakes testing environment has decreased student desire for writing in the classroom. At the high school level, in fact, testing preparation for writing assessment makes pedagogical creativity in this arena difficult in terms of what teachers believe to be appropriate practice of writing instruction (Slomp, 2005). Slomp continues by noting that teachers feel conflicted as to whether or not they should teach to the test or teach for self-discovery. Good writing can rarely be completed in the pressure cooker that is a standardized testing environment (Smagorinsky, 2000). The larger problem with the standardized testing of writing, Carter (2006) observes, is that it treats literacy as if it is "…neutral, autonomous, and completely potable" (p. 95). The increase in standardized testing practice for writing tests undermines what research suggests is beneficial for young writers and the importance of identity formation (Hillocks, 2003; Carter, 2006).

The influence of standardized testing is pervasive in the writing classroom and problematic. Writing is a formative and social event which roots students in a deeply personal act of reflection, commentary, and social acknowledgement. While writing, students form and reform identities against the larger identities of a school and the dominant culture in which they write (Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2004). This identity is intimately attached to their understanding of family, culture, and self. Given, Wagner, Belleau, and Smith (2007) acknowledge writing as a powerful tool for unveiling student identities, and they warn that teachers should be careful to foster self-discovery. Guzzetti and Gamboa further note that students have different selves, and that classrooms should seek to connect to one or all of these selves through the act of writing. In a culturally relevant English classroom, teachers should develop innovative ways for students to

which build on the cultural and personal strengths each child possesses (Jocson, 2008). Writing is the proper vehicle for such innovation because it allows students to create an alternative discourse against the dominant narrative (Buras, 2009).

Young writers can be encouraged to increase their critical literacy skills and their ability to interrogate embedded structures which marginalize them. Camanigian (2008) defines this type of writing as social justice writing. Social justice writing takes its cue from the teacher. Utilizing the critically conscious work of Freire and the pedagogical relevance of culture as Ladson-Billings (1994) discusses, the classroom teacher lays the foundation and sets the tone of the classroom which grows and supports the social justice writer. Singer and Shogoury (2006) note the goal of educators should be to work toward positive social change through words. At the very least, Jocson (2008) observes, teachers should expand definitions of reading and writing to account for multiple differences situated in particular socio-cultural contexts.

Expanding these contexts from a pedagogical standpoint allows teachers to open doors for students; Ciardello (2010), for instance, comments on the fact that social justice poetry, a type of writing which engages students and encourages democratic interactions, has promise for increasing student writing efficacy in the classroom. He suggests that social justice poetry is not politically neutral; rather it is represents a power, the voice of the dispossessed. Not only does Ciardello believe that social justice poetry should be a powerful agent for change, but he also suggests that its chief aim is to humanize those who have often been dehumanized. As an art form, it establishes trust in the classroom and supports fundamental human rights. Jocson (2008) reiterates the above comments made by Ciardello. Looking specifically at Poetry for the People, a movement in urban schools to connect students with the empowerment of words, Jocson's

qualitative study notes that Poetry for the People has two objectives: 1) to create a safe medium for empowerment and 2) to democratize the medium of poetry to include the under-represented.

The medium and voice are integral to the English classroom as they offer students empowerment through words. Camanigan (2008) observes that even when students feel confidence in their varied voices and celebrate the power that is their voice they will continue when other powers shut them down. Citing an example in which students turned onto the power of poetry writing were shut down by administrators at a local school, Camanigan documents that the students continued to meet in a classroom away from the watchful eyes of administrators. This subversive act even gained enough recognition in the school to name itself as the C.I.H.E.R. (Conscious, Intelligent Poets Highly Elevating Revolution). Primarily performance poetry, this vehicle for writing and discussion offered students a place to practice words, learn words, and voice social concerns which may not be popular with administrators seeking to maintain the status quo of marginalization. Rodriguez-Valls (2009) found that Hispanic students and other culturally diverse students look for educational spaces to express their identities. Through poetry, Rodriguez-Valls argues, students can find this space and the tools to be successful at expressing themselves. Other genres of writing such as zines, self-published alternatives to popular culture magazines, can have similar impacts. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) note that zines can provide adolescent girls with a voice to express counternarratives to culture definitions of them as boy crazed and image obsessed. Heyman (2004) acknowledges that writing is expands and broadens the "…the possibility for student agency and expand access to power" (p. 148).

Because the act of writing is personal, teachers must, as Slack (2001) suggests, encourage students to write about their world. Infusing this world with assignments such as multi-genre

papers, memoirs, personal narratives, and social justice poetry allows for students to become critical literacy practitioners and to be more aware of their own lived experience. In the process, teachers will find that their lives are changed through the critical reflective practice of teaching students about the world around them. Freire (1970) acknowledges that this reflective practice should be a dialogue between student and teacher. Because writing is a dialogue of internal understanding of an external world, it is a proper discipline from which students can explore the lived experiences of themselves and others through the democratic pedagogy of willing teachers.

Critical Literacy as Socially Just

The critical practitioner can encourage other forms of identity expression outside of the act of writing. Follow up activities and student writing benefit from multiple classroom interactions which involve critical recognition of place within societal structures. Critical literacy, to a great degree, is about helping students understand place and identity in classrooms and society. Lasden-Billings (1992) notes that "the primary goal of culturally relevant teaching is to empower students to examine critically the society in which they live and work for social change" (p. 314). Thinking critically is foundational for teachers who desire to use cultural relevance and critical pedagogy to embolden students intellectually and culturally.

Critical literacy exists in conjunction with critical pedagogy because one provides an avenue for the success of the other: "There can be no liberation of self or other without the tools or language to perform counter-readings of dominant texts that serve the interests of power" (Morrell, 2003, p. 5). Morrell's definition points out the major aspects of critical literacy. As he defines it, critical literacy is a means of extirpating the influence of dominant culture texts by helping students to see what was not meant to be seen. This finding of a space in dominant narratives can only occur when critical pedagogy grounds itself in the following tenets discussed

by Morrell: historicity, problem-posing, dialogic talk, social justice, and reflection/action. Morrell maintains that these tenets are not stages; rather, they are ways of supporting critical literacy development.

Indeed, critical literacy in practice takes many different forms and provides an interesting practical look at literacy. As a discipline, it requires teachers to engage students, localize instruction, research and analyze information, and design texts (Comber, 1999). Critical literacy involves both what is stated and what is understated in textual and visual productions. Thus, as a pedagogical stance, critical literacy is a way of reading the world. Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) note, for example, that Augosto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, a movement by a group of dramatists focused on expressive body movements and sounds, opened the minds of students, allowing them to see the world differently. Image Theater techniques, activities based upon the larger movement of the Theater Oppressed, engage students in thinking of ways to present images outside of their normal realm of existence in a theatrical fashion. During the course of three days, Rozansky and Aagesen's had their eighth grade participants physically represent social positioning by standing on chairs or bowing their heads; students also questioned the morality of border guards turning their backs on children who wanted to join their parents who did not have citizenship in America. Through these activities, students gained a critical understanding of the world beyond their own experiences.

In the English classroom, multiple-perspective texts invite the discussion of texts having different ways of communicating events. Jones (2006) suggests that these parts should deconstruct, reconstruct, and involve social action in the deconstruction phase, students take apart literature, deconstructing issues of power as well as issues of control. One activity that Clarke and Whitney (2009) utilize to deconstruct text is the visual representation activity. This

activity involves the teacher's cutting apart a common visual and handing it back to student in a piecemeal state. With a piece of the puzzle, each student recreates the picture, demonstrating that seeing different perspectives is important. In other words, that which exists and previously did not exist are valued when individualized by students.

Similarly, the reconstruction and social action phases involve activities that activate student in a non-traditional manner. In the reconstruction phase, students "…reconstruct meaning" (Clarke and Whitney, p. 533). Diary entry activities allow students to write from the perspective of multiple understandings. Clarke and Whitney use the pertinent example of having students write about the traditional version of what is taught in the school concerning the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. After reading Jane Yolen's *Encounter*, a young adult fiction retelling of the story from the perspective of the indigenous people whom Columbus encountered, teachers, in this example, had students write diary entries from both perspectives. Thus, reconstruction involves the rewriting of texts to add context and texture. Clearly, Clark and Whitney reveal that social action involves agency, movement, and sight. As students learn to see themselves connected to the larger world, they can connect to larger social issues and see the differences they can make (Comber, 1999; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010; Rodesiler, 2010). In support of this work, Rozansky and Aagesen (2010) note that critical literacy should make students active citizens.

Another manifestation of critical literacy, which the literature supports, is the ability of critical literacy to counteract hegemonic cultural forces in the media. Because media is situated and social in practice, it has different effects on students, often depending on their own cultural and personal values (Gainer, 2010). In western countries as in other countries around the world,

the media shapes these images of cultures. Thus, critical literacy has the ability to inform students about how and why these images are created.

Rodesiler (2010) suggests a pedagogical framework for viewing critical media literacy that incorporates ways to for students to question media construction. Rodesiler's program, entitled MAPS, includes modes, audiences, purposes, and situations as ways to analyze media attempts to persuade. In the mode stage of Rodesiler's acronym, students examine multimodalities such as speeches, songs, and images. Looking at these individually helps students to think about the onslaught of images attempting to get messages across. Audience and purpose, though not new to any type of rhetorical analysis, provide students with a "why." Thinking about, for instance, the intended audience gives answers to why certain images are generated. Finally, Rodesiler's situations help students understand context. Examining media messages through this useful framework gives students autonomy over media messages and an understanding of manipulative forces in the media. Gainer (2010) states that teachers can allow students to counter dominant discourse narratives by providing a place for students to make space for their own cultural identity.

Summary

The institution of schooling is situated in a complex web of social and cultural interactions that exist antithetically to the identity of many students within the larger student body of many schools in America. Racial minority students do not, for example, fit into the normal pattern of American schooling. Standardized testing, institutionalized racism, and a primarily white profession, which are integral components to American schooling today, contribute to the lack of success of racial minority students. One way to reduce the impacts of the institution of schooling is for teachers to utilize pedagogical strategies that encourage

students to embrace their unique cultural identity. Such pedagogical strategies do not inhibit students from mastering educational standards, and such strategies foster awareness (Banks, 2006). From critically conscious perspective, awareness is pivotal for racial minority students attending schools empowered by the dominative narrative of whiteness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, Gary R. Howard (1999) notes that racism for whites is like an uncle locked away, hiding in the attic. Racism exists, and it is ever-present. Unfortunately, racism, Howard states, stays hidden because it is an embarrassing reality which is seldom dealt with and often disseminated consciously and unconsciously *en masse* through schools and other patriarchal institutions. The institutionalized setting of school, Freire (1992) contends, embraces the banking concept of education, a concept which suggests that students receive an education from the teacher without an individual voice in their own learning. Aronowitz (2004) words the inequality inherent in the educational system in the following manner:

> Schooling is surely a source of training both by its disciplinary regime and by its credentialing system. But schools do not transmit a 'love for the world' or for 'children,' as Arendt suggests; contrary to their democratic pretensions, they teach conformity to the social, cultural, and occupational hierarchy (p. 108).

As Aronowitz articulates, schooling is often undemocratic in its function, particularly for students who do not live within the dominant culture. Schooling is a cultural form of the dominant culture, and historically, the dominant culture exercises hegemony over those who do not practice similar linguistic or cultural patterns (McLaren, 1999).

Antithetical to the institution of schools are those who are not, then, part of the dominant culture. In the English classroom, for example, racial minority students are held to the standards of an educational system to which they have not been given access by virtue of their color or their familial background. This qualitative research project allowed me to tell their story through the pedagogical decisions of their white teachers. I explored the context in which these professionals exist as well as the pedagogical relationship between diverse learner and teacher.

Methodological Orientation and Research QuestionsFor this study, I utilized the tools of qualitative research. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note, qualitative researchers utilize settings because context is important. Setting and observations are pivotal to understanding the "…where, how, and under what circumstances…" events unfold (p. 5). In addition to the setting, a modified analytic inductive approach is primary to this study as it offers insight into how events occur and lead to thematic understanding. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) state that the modified analytic approach begins with specific research questions and utilizes specific cases to arrive at an explanation of phenomena.

Because qualitative research scrutinizes how people make meaning of their lives, I focused on the interaction and the construction of meaning by teachers who seek to understand the students in their classroom as well as the complex milieu in which these students learn. As a teacher myself, I documented my positionality because the issue of race and my own upbringing are pivotal to an understanding of the study. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) note that researchers must write themselves towards an understanding of events within the field and within their relation to the field. I completed this task, and my middle class white background informs this study as well as the lens through which I see this study.

The life experiences of the participants in any study, as Merriam (2009) notes, are the basis for qualitative research. In order to frame my study and to establish a basis for my study, I have developed two research questions:

1. What is the impact of white privilege on racial minority students in the school setting?
2. To what extent do white teachers activate the cultural and familial experiences of racial minority students?

My primary goal was to examine two English teachers and their interactions with these racial minority students. Moreover, this study will look at the intersection of racial minority students and the negative impacts testing has on these learners (Hilliard, 1997; Pederson, 2007; Hillocks, 2003), specifically in terms of the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test (GHSGWT).

Case Study Research

Merriam (2009) defines case study as "…as in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p.40). A bounded system, as it is further explicated by Merriam, is a confined unit of data that comprises the heart of a study and has a limit to the number of interviewees and observations. Yin (2009) states that a case study is an "…empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real life context" (p. 18). He continues by noting that case studies blur the boundary between phenomenon and context, provide for many variables of interest, rely on sources for triangulation, and benefit from "…theoretical propositions to guide the collection of data and analysis" (p. 18).

In particular, this case study was a multi-case study. As delineated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), a multi-case study involves two or more subjects. In this case study, two or more case studies were compared in order to examine the ways in which teachers teach writing.

Bogdan and Biklen acknowledge that, generally, when researchers conduct multi-case studies, they use different locations and that most researchers do not embark upon fieldwork at more than one site at a time. The design of this research project was different as it is a multi-case study which does look at two units in the same location. Yin (2009) writes that case study replication created by using multiple participants within the case study research paradigm may be more powerful in terms of revealing themes and data. In a similar fashion, Tellis (1997) argues that multiple cases strengthen the results of a qualitative study. This strengthening of results makes case study results more robust.

Research Setting and Participants

The research setting for this study is Topeka High School in Johnson County. Both Topeka High School and Johnson County are pseudonyms. According to the most recent Georgia Report Card (2008-2009) released by the Georgia Department of Education, Topeka High School has a 61% white population and 33% black population. The Hispanic populations represent 5%o of the overall population, while Asian students represent 1%. Thirty-two percent of the school's population is eligible for free and reduced lunch and 2% of the school is labeled as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP). These statistics represent a shift in demographic representation. In the 2005-2006 school year, 76% of the students represented in the school were listed as white, while 17% identified themselves as black. Four percent of the school stated they were from a Hispanic background (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). This shift in school population is important to note because it highlights Johnson County's growing diversity.

The primary locations of this multi-case study research project were the classrooms of two tenth grade literature teachers. I used purposeful sampling to choose the participants in this study. Merriam (2009) defines convenience sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, as a

selection based upon "…time, money, location, availability of sites and respondents…" (p. 79). I chose my participants on the basis of both location and availability. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) remark that when case studies of an organization are conducted logically they can be "…rich sources of information" (p. 314).

At Topeka High School, the focus for tenth grade literature is persuasive writing in order to properly prepare students for the eleventh grade writing test known as the GHSGWT. I chose the participants for this study because their focus should be persuasive writing. They also represented the dominant cultural of the school and the larger milieu of America. As white teachers, the participants belong to what Delpit (2007) calls the culture of power. The way in which these teachers understand the diversity in their classroom and taught according to this understanding is the basis of this study.

Negotiating Access

In many ways, I negotiated access at Topeka High School years ago. I have taught at the school for the past seven years prior to this study. My training and certification allow me to teach in the honors program at the high school; additionally, I teach traditional college preparatory courses in the English department at Topeka High School. This experience afforded me the luxury of knowing the participants and many of the students. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that oftentimes the researcher must make a low-key entrance into the research setting in order to mitigate fears about the obtrusiveness of a researcher in the classroom. Before my study began, I visited the classrooms of the participants so that they would have an opportunity to be comfortable with me in the research setting. This act allowed me to begin observing the relationships within the classroom.

The female participant whose room was next to mine stated a certain amount of reluctance to be in the study—at least initially—because she doubted my motives for the study. Even though I reassured her that I am not fishing for negative information, she seemed nervous about my being in her classroom. Additionally, we have a history as professionals, and on one occasion she expressed disapproval towards my playing music loudly in my classroom during the mornings. Stating that her students were distracted, she made the point that I was being disrespectful to her classroom and her students. She was guarded about her classroom and not always fond of my way of conducting business.

The male participant and I had a relationship that was less formal. While I would not say that we are the best of friends, we have gone to local establishments to imbibe alcohol on several occasions. All of these occurrences were professional in the sense that we were discussing schools, lessons, and units in the relaxed atmosphere of a restaurant or a bar. Additionally, we have worked together as colleagues in different capacities. Analyzing his teaching style was new to me because I had never observed his teaching.

Researcher's Role

As a researcher, I was the careful observer that Merriam (2009) discusses, but certain difficulties arose in this endeavor. Specifically, the two participants as well as many of the students in the classes knew me. I have a friendship, in fact, with the male participant. The other participant is a Facebook friend. While these associations with the teachers made my role difficult, my relationship with many of the students who were ninth graders prior to the study (and tenth graders during the study), made for interesting classroom dynamics from time to time. The students asked me about Guitar Club, a club I lead at the school, and they asked me if I was teaching certain classes next year. Because fieldwork involves a situating of self into a place in

order to document interactions (Berger, 2001), I documented student-researcher interactions as well as teacher responses to such interactions.

Even though I am a colleague of these teachers, I took my role as researcher seriously. My role was to observe and provide a rich description of the context in which instruction occurred. Thick description within case study research helps the study to speak to similar situations outside of the case study (Geertz, 1973; Stake, 1978). I listened to conversations about the classroom, pedagogy, and students in the classrooms of the participants. The words of the teachers spoke life into this study and its subsequent analysis.

Moreover, as a white male who has benefited from a dominant culture of power, I realized early during this project that my perspective tainted the study. The world I see is altered by the lens of privilege, which is imperfect no matter how many times I read Freire or Ladson-Billings. I know what the research says for diverse students; but my default setting, my training, and my upbringing obscured the lens I was developing as a researcher. Conscious of Applebaum's warning that "…white complicity is not easily recognized by those in dominant social positions…" (p. 456), I documented my biases and my own struggles as a white teacher to become a social justice educator. Thus, my role was to document the manner in which transformative pedagogy was utilized in the classrooms and to acknowledge my own struggles and beliefs about the democratic nature of social justice pedagogy (Aronowitz, 2004) .

Data Collection Plan

In this study, I gathered data from multiple sources. Interviews, focus groups, document analysis, observations, and teacher diaries served as the primary units of data. I collected this data over fifteen weeks from March to May. During the data collection period of this study, I observed Sean thirteen times and Sarah and her co-teacher, John, fifteen times. I interviewed

Sean and Sarah in focus groups twice. The importance of focus groups cannot be overstated. Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) note that multiple focus groups allow for rich data collection. Individually, I interviewed Sean four times and Sarah six times. Because John's impact in the classroom was minimal in terms of planning and teaching, I interviewed him once. Sean and Sarah submitted three reflective journal entries for lessons I observed. For this study, teacher documents were collected and analyzed, too.

Kouritizin (2002) cautions that when researchers write, they need to be careful of constructing a reality for those they write about: "…when researchers record fieldnotes they also create worldviews based on *a priori* perceptions and interpretations" (p. 119). Kouritizin continues by stating word choice and structure are important considerations as these choices color the setting and the participants. In this study, fieldnotes were important to the study and my understanding of the research environment, and I kept them accurately in order to document the phenomena which occurred in the classroom. I also wrote observer comments to record my own thinking about my observations. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that this type of fieldnote may consist of portraits of subjects, reconstructions of dialogue, descriptions of settings, accounts of events, and depictions of activities. Although fieldnotes were essential to this study, I also wrote reflective fieldnotes. I was able to reflect upon the nature of the study as well as future interview questions or any ethical dilemmas which might arise. Kouritizin (2002) acknowledges that the reflective writing of fieldnotes must be attempted carefully, but they do require the researcher to reflect frequently.

Data Management Plan

All the data collected were managed in a way that is secure and organized. I recorded all interviews on a digital recorder. This digitized record allowed the documentation to be accurate. Member checking strengthened the accuracy of my note taking. Carlson (2010) defines member checking as a way to verify accuracy of a participant's narrative contribution to a study. Noting that qualitative researchers must be careful to verify information continually, Carlson suggests that data be scrutinized continuously so that the researcher, the participants, and the final report reflect trustworthiness in representation. I transcribed my interviews on the day I conducted them. Additionally, the number of observations, interviews, and documents were tabulated on a spreadsheet. All information for this dissertation was stored on a password protected computer.

Content Analysis

Content analysis, Merriam (2007) writes, is the collection of data and the reduction of data to smaller categories. Grbich (2007) states that content analysis is a "…systematic coding and categorizing approach" which allows the researcher to look at trends and the frequency of certain words, phrases, or themes in the qualitative paradigm (p. 112). I utilized content analysis and constantly compare the data gathered through two types of coding. I utilized open coding because it allowed me view the data and to create codes without any preconceived notions of what might be occurring within the research setting. I also used an outside reader to confirm the reliability of my coding. This reader was a graduate student working on her dissertation as well.

In axial coding, the researcher categorizes the codes again in order to collapse the previous codes into a more manageable and a more representative list of the major concepts within the data. Thus, content analysis provided a framework for me to sift through the data and glean relevant themes.

Atlas TI

Garcia-Horta and Guerra-Ramos (2008) observe that the use of computer software to analyze the rich vein of data within the qualitative paradigm is extremely common. According to Garcia-Horta and Guerra-Ramos, Computer Assisted Qualitative Design Analysis Software (CAQDAS) can be used as a "…a tool to support the analytic process without overlooking the nature of the data" (p. 153). The primary function of CAQDAS programs is to make data management more efficient, and while many researches in the social sciences argue that a mechanistic substitute for manual data management will never approximate the humanity of the researcher (Davis & Meyer, 2009), CAQDAS systems do not remove the human element entirely. This study used a CAQDAS program because it enhances the overall data analysis by allowing the researcher to "…archive, index, and analyze visual data" (Parmeggiani, 2009, p. 79).

Atlas Ti is a software program which allows the researcher to code and organize those codes in a fluent and logical manner. It is one among many CAQDAS choices which allows this daunting process to become more manageable. Parmeggiani (2009) states that *Atlas Ti* allow for much flexibility:

> The program [*Atlas Ti*] keeps track of all notes, annotations, codes, and memos and provides analytical and visualization tools designed to lead to new interpretative views of the material. Particularly useful to me has been the direct linkage of code segments of data, such as a detail within an image. (p.78)

Atlas Ti assisted my creation of codes during the open coding process, and it helped me collapse codes during axial coding. Additionally, the program helped my analysis. Being able to link data is a useful visualization tool for researchers.

Positionality

As I mentioned in my "Origination of Study" section, I first became interested in issues of culture in an African American literature class in college. Issues of power and access were common discussion points in this class, and I began to see the world differently. Georgia Southern University in 1997 was not a cultural center or a place immersed in diversity, but there were boycotts of the school newspaper by African-American students because of racially insensitive editorials. To be honest, this college experience was my first encounter with the power of non-violent protests. Because of these experiences and my African-American literature class, I read differently, and more to the point, I acted differently in the world in which I lived. I questioned familial positions as well as media biases about race. In many ways, I became an armchair advocate for equity. It was not until I landed my first teaching job that my armchair advocacy came in contact with the entrenched mindset of the rural communities in the South.

To be fair, I grew up in Savannah, Georgia, in the 1980s, so I understood this mindset. South Georgia and Savannah, in particular, were not openly racist communities in my youth. Racism was hidden behind the walls of houses when discussions of the old historic district surfaced. Discussions of race were reserved for the dinner table and the car or even the private school football field. I distinctly remember my own Baptist affiliated school not recognizing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a holiday; rather the school called the day Records Day. Ostensibly, the day was meant for teachers to grade or plan; neither the school nor the teachers mentioned the Civil Rights movement in classes. Because I attended an all white school and was surrounded by similarly constructed identities, I did not question the motives or the design of such a school.

In graduate school, I encountered equity infused tracts and conversations, which made me question the world around me. In the two years of graduate school I spent at Clemson University, I spent time thinking about privilege and issues of justice. When I began teaching middle school in 2000, I realized that many of the students in my classes came from a similar background—a background much like mine. Even though I viewed the world differently than they did, I realized that the South was still the South in its mindset about racial equity. Schools, in my opinion, still continued to reflect this truism. Many of my students, though well-intentioned in their thoughts and deeds, were steeped in the long legacy of racial injustice of this country. They acted accordingly, defending positions about state flags while sitting across the room from students from African-American backgrounds. Nothing overt was ever said or mentioned, but the subtlety of their racial feelings was present and palpable in my classroom.

My quasi-public crusades about race, no matter how well-planned, generally fell on deaf ears. I prided myself, however, on trying. What I realized through the early years of my teaching is that my efforts might have been noble, but they were piecemeal at best. A lack of resources and a lack of knowledge in general about pedagogy had me teaching Shakespeare and Golding with a sprinkling of what I thought of as necessary racial education 101. In my ignorance, I persisted until I began to see and understand the larger picture of inequity in the classrooms of this country. While attending Kennesaw State University as a doctoral student, I read the works of Freire, Ladson-Billing, and Kushamiro. These writers and thinkers were pivotal in my growth and the future development of this study. Their words allowed me to see simultaneously the intersection of privilege and pedagogy. This study, however, is a point in my continuing desire to understand how my whiteness impacts the classroom. I would be lying if I said I had reached all of my racial minority students, and I would also be lying if I said that I

made daily choices as a teacher for racial minority students. Oftentimes, I do not think about my racial minority students at all. Thus, I am in transition—learning about myself and my racial minority students.

Storytelling and the Autoethnographic Angle

In qualitative research, storytelling offers the researcher the opportunity to account for the multiple levels which occur within the research inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990):

> The central task is evident when it is grasped that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others. For the researcher, this is a portion of the complexity of the narrative, because a life is also a matter of growth toward an imagined future, and, therefore, involves retelling stories and attempts at reliving stories. (p. 4).

In this study, I embraced storytelling in the form of the case study narratives of the participants. This study reflected the words of the participants and my observations. As the researcher, I wrote these stories because they illuminated the intersection of privilege and writing instruction for racial minority students.

Because I am from the dominant culture and an English teacher who has a story to tell, I also, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) note in their autoethnographical writings, wrote my narrative as a white practitioner in the classroom. Through writing my narrative, I understood the journey of the white participants more intensely; additionally, my own story broadened the scope of the participants and their stories. These techniques enhanced the overall strength of the findings of this study. My experiences with racial minority students are rich and telling examples of my own victories and failures. I believe the stories of the participants are similar. By combining case study research and elements of storying borrowed from the branch of qualitative research

known as autoethnography, I enhanced the overall dynamic between white teacher and diverse student to make the experiences palpable for the reader. In a real way, I offered the reader a way to share in my emotional journey.

Confidentiality / Ethics

In order to ensure confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for both the school and the two teachers in this study. Since my interests have always been teachers, especially the ones I know, I ensured the members of my study that the information they share with me will not be shared with their principal or with the school district. This anonymity is a limitation of the study because my employer is the school system in which this study was conducted. I am a colleague of the participants and confidentiality was difficult to ensure because many individuals knew that I was conducting a study using Sean, Sarah, and John. I completed all of the interviews and collected all of the data, saving it on a password protected computer.

As I am a teacher employed by the same school district as the teachers involved in this study, I knew the principal and many of the students in the classrooms of the participants. Although the principal and the participants were made aware of this study and its overarching research questions, I chose not to discuss the entirety of this study with the principal or the participants because doing so could disrupt the research setting by encouraging inadvertent questions about the teachers and the students in the class. Thus, I attempted to protect the identity of the participants and the way they teach as much as possible so that this study reflected honesty and integrity.

Trustworthiness

This study established trustworthiness in the qualitative paradigm by triangulation, member checking, writing descriptively, and acknowledging researcher biases in a manner that

allows me to be honest and forthcoming about my feelings and my observations. Merriam (2009) relates trustworthiness to ethics, suggesting that the qualitative researcher has multiple methods by which to establish his/her credit in the study. He suggests that triangulation, member checking, adequate engagement in data collection, peer review, audit trail, and researcher reflexivity provide a strong basis for ethical trustworthiness.

Triangulation is important to qualitative research, and I used triangulation to further establish my trustworthiness. Grbich (2007) defines triangulation as looking at "…multiple reference points where intact but separate data sets are collected concurrently" (p. 198). In looking at the multiple reference points, the researcher attempts to identify patterns which show emerging themes which are relevant for a written discussion within the larger framework of the study. The premise of triangulation, Carlson (2010) argues, establishes trustworthiness by using multiple data points to validate claims. In this study, I triangulated by using multiple data points from personal interviews, focus group interviews, observations, teacher diaries, and documents created by the participant.

Limitations

Wolcott (2009) observes that limitations are important to research because studies take place in a particular setting at a particular time. In another classroom with another teacher or another group of students, other results are possible. Even though I attempted, as Yin (2009) notes, to increase the reliability of my results by having multiple participants in my case study, time and place limited me to a degree. In American schools, researchers know that power is held by the few and rarely distributed to racial minority students. As Tim Wise (2008) has pointed out in *White Like Me*, privilege has advantages in public school settings, but the degree and the

nature of this interaction with diversity might have a more subtle or a more overt impact in certain settings. Thus, time, place, and the participants were limitations of this study.

As difficult as it is for me to admit, the pronoun "I" was a limitation of this study as well. Even though, I was careful to member check and to make sure that my comments and my coding are properly conducted in a manner that follows research protocols suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I ultimately sifted this entire study through my own eyes; and as a white teacher and researcher looking at diversity, there are certain interactions—both socially and intellectually—which might slip through my researcher's gaze. Most of my academic training and my classroom training has upheld the dominant ideology present in American schools; and while I am still a work in progress in terms of my journey toward becoming a researcher, thinker, and a transformative pedagogical practitioner, I recognize that no matter how imperfect my gaze might be, this study has merit. Howard (2006), for example, notes that while whites cannot be the only change, change cannot happen within educational circles without them. Freire (1992) writings about the nature of dialogic interactions within the broader of field of education are important to consider because they suggest that the oppressor must be part of any democratization of education.

Summary

For the purposes of this study, I gathered data through observations, teacher diaries, focus group interviews, personal interviews, and observations. I examined this data through content analysis and coded through open coding and axial coding. I used *Atlas Ti* to manage and sort the data effectively. My data was triangulated from the different types of data collected during the study. Furthermore, I used reflective memos with observational comments as well as observational notes with observer comments. Primarily, these memos functioned as part of the

ongoing analysis of my own thinking about the interactions that the participants have with their own students (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1999). These interactions were crucial to my understanding of how the white teachers in this study interacted with their diverse students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Annette: …You know what I hate. I hate when you call out a student's name from the roll and that student corrects you. The other day I got to a name spelled ***J-o-a-q-u-a-n.*** How would you pronounce that?"

Mary Lynn: Joequen, I guess.

Annette: Right…the student had the nerve to correct me telling me that it was actually pronounced Jooquan. Like, how am I going to know that? If you want your child's name to be pronounced correctly, then you should use a common name like Laura or John. I can't pronounce these names.

Jason Pritchett:…

I am listening to the above conversation as I sit in the break room at Topeka High School. I marvel at the randomness of the dialogue. Seemingly, it appears out of nowhere. This dialogue follows a conversation about retirement and gardening, and on this day, like many of the days this school year, we, as teachers, sit and talk or work on whatever half-finished crossword puzzle we can find. In a few minutes, the room will be filled with microwaves signaling the readiness of Hot Pockets and frozen dinners. Another group of teachers will take or place. For now, though, the above conversation hangs in the air and lands heavily on my mind.

While listening to the teachers talk between bites of lunch sandwiches, I cannot help but think of my dissertation topic. I am not necessarily appalled by the conversation because I know the teachers in this room well, but it wears on me. This conversation is tedious and inflexible—a hefty dose of what I have been reading about throughout the entirety of my doctoral studies.

Whiteness, research reminds us, is an unjust and culturally insensitive way of institutionalizing a system of mutually held beliefs that marginalizes diverse cultures (Dorfman and Schiraldi, 2001). At the expense of other cultures, whiteness perpetuates a dominant ideology in schools and other institutions (Hytten & Adkins, 2001). This conversation perpetuates preference and the dominant ideology of a group of white teachers.

As a doctoral candidate, my main focus in life right now is my dissertation. Everything looks like a research project these days, and my own project intertwines with this discussion of names. I am interested in race and whiteness and the intersection of the two as they occur in the classroom, and specifically, I am interested in what happens when teachers are white and their students connect to a different racial designation. This break room conversation reminds me of why I want to pursue this topic. This dialogue takes place in 2011 at a high school in America near one of the largest cities in North America, and I am witnessing a discussion about names that, in effect, suggests that one name or one culture's list of names is superior. As ridiculous as this conversation is in terms of the body of multicultural research available for practitioners and the copious amounts of workshops on the topic of professional learning opportunities, I am keenly aware at this moment that teachers view their students from diverse backgrounds as culturally inferior. This conversation reminds me that racial minority students are viewed as culturally insufficient before they even write the first sentence or answer the first question in the classroom. Oftentimes, white teachers, as these teachers are, demonstrate a cultural preference in the classroom and even refuse to acknowledge the cultural or familial importance of the names of their students (Applebaum, 2007). This conversation sets an interesting mood, and it punctuates the beginning of my interviews and observations at Topeka High School.

The individuals in this conversation are influential and have in many ways power over the operations of the English department at Topeka High School. In this group, a department head and a senior teacher are flanked by the silence of a third teacher. That third teacher is me, and my reluctance to enter into this discussion demonstrates my introspection and thoughtfulness, but it also demonstrates the nature of my involvement in the cultural hegemony that is the institution of schooling in America. As a white teacher, I am at times the problem when it comes to my students of diversity, and even though I have an intimate knowledge of the research that frames this dissertation, I choose silence instead of action at this moment. Consequently, I do not challenge the ideas present at the table; instead, I choose a path of inaction and endorse the racist mindset at work during this conversation. I know better, but the challenge of acting against the mindset that has enveloped me since my childhood paralyzes me. The bell rings before my thoughts on this matter are complete, and we shuffle off to our respective classrooms. Although this conversation is over in a temporal sense, it continues for many days in my mind. Never before have I been more aware that I am more than a researcher for this project. I am a co-conspirator in the disruption of the academic success of the racial minority students in my classroom.

This dissertation underscores my journey of understanding my own struggles with my racial minority classroom, and the similar struggles of two primary classroom teachers in the same position. Importantly, the dissertation also looks at one white co-teacher in his mid-50s, who assisted the female participant in this study. For all of our education and all of our intentions to do well for our students¸ our whiteness and the collective experience of being white in America influences our relationships, assessments, expectations, and pedagogical choices. Most importantly, our collective whiteness impacts our students because of our direct and

indirect interactions with their diversity. This intersection of the dominant culture and the racial minority culture provides an interesting cross-section of the failures and accomplishments of America's mostly white teacher workforce. My dissertation demonstrates a snapshot of this cultural intersection.

For years, researchers have argued that whiteness, a socio-cultural construct, is institutionalized and pervasive in schools in America (e.g., DePalma, 2008; Hytten & Adkins, 2001). That is, schools reflect the majority mindset of whiteness, a mindset which privileges one group over other groups of individuals who often occupy the same space. In schools where students of racial minority backgrounds occupy the same space as the white majority of teachers, racist privileging occurs, especially as Gusa (2010) argues when "…whites neglect to identify the ways in which White ideological homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression" (p. 465). From a systemic perspective, the importance of whites not recognizing the hegemonic forces which marginalize the racial minority students in their classes cannot be understated. The degree by which white teachers impart the racist privileging of whiteness demonstrates the necessity of training teachers to become aware of their own biases (Ndura, 2003).

In this chapter, I extrapolate three themes which were corroborated by the actions, words, and handouts of the white teachers in this study; and I demonstrate, through qualitative analysis, the impact of whiteness in two classrooms at Topeka High School. The first theme I gleaned from this study is that the white teachers in this study teach from a worldview which demonstrates a monolithic cultural gaze that is white. This gaze manifests itself in day-to-day classroom operations. The second theme is that when white teachers are inclusive of other cultures they impede any progress that might occur from such inclusiveness by poor lesson

planning. Finally, I noticed that the subtle relationship between power and assessment allows white teachers to use their power in the classroom to assess their racially diverse students in ways that place them at a scholastic disadvantage. Again, I believe this to be an unintentional byproduct of the systemic way schooling is conducting in America, but nevertheless, this final themes underscores the need for change.

Cast of Characters

Today, I will interview Sarah, my first participant, and I am interested in doing everything correctly. When thinking about my dissertation project in the Fall of 2009, I remember wanting to look at writing. Specifically, as someone who prides himself on his creative approach to the teaching of writing, I wanted to look at how writing teachers who teach tenth grade were able to help the students in their classroom prepare for the eleventh grade writing test. In Georgia, the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test (GHSGWT) is the primary assessment that the State and teachers often use to determine a student's writing ability. My observations over the past seven years of teaching high school is that many teachers only assign writing during the preparation for this test. Tenth grade teachers and eleventh grade teachers alike generally spend ten to eleven weeks throughout a student's high school experience teaching students how to write persuasively. As such, the preparation for this test is the dominant message that high school students receive about writing. I am interested as a researcher in learning about how these teachers teach writing. I want to know what other pedagogical practices these teachers use to teach the racial minority students in their classrooms. I begin with Sarah.

Sarah

As I walk into my first interview with Sarah, the female participant, I remember that she has reluctantly agreed to do this study. In her own words, she believes this year has been a tough one, and her initial reluctance to participate in this study suggests to me that she might have been initially unwilling to take on one more task. One divorce, two bladder infections, and several bouts of sickness in her family have made for what she calls her most challenging year to date. This year, she has missed more than several full days of school—most of these absences occurred after Christmas.

All absences are frowned upon by our administrators and our school district, and I must admit that I enter into my first interview with Sarah hesitantly. I have been known to have disagreements with her. A couple of weeks ago, for example, Sarah asked me in front of my students to turn down my music because it was playing too loudly. She was right to do so because she had a class going on at the time; nevertheless, it has made our relationship awkward, and to some degree, this chiding has frustrated me. I do not like being reprimanded by adults, even if I am in the wrong. Sarah has admitted to me before that she does not like a noisy classroom. I am sure she feels the same way about a noisy neighbor.

As high school classrooms go, Sarah's is similar to many I have seen. On the back wall, standards for the grades she teaches—in this case tenth and eleventh grade—are posted next to student samples with a limited amount of teacher commentary. At first glance, the student samples seem as if they are persuasive writing pamphlets; but as I approach them and take a look, these samples are more along the lines of how to write than they are a pamphlet of student writing samples. Our county requires all teachers to post student samples with commentary, so I find it odd that Sarah's postings are prescriptive rules which the students copied down. For

Sarah, though, the lack of teacher commentary might be related to all of the family and personal issues. Taking a mental note, I know that I must be careful not to anger Sarah or to push too hard in this first interview. I am aware of the fragile nature of our current relationship too.

It is 3:25 or so, and Sarah is not in her room for our expected meeting. I continue walking around the room, trying to soak up what it would be like to be in this classroom. On the wall a quote by Paul Laurence Dunbar expresses an interesting sentiment. It reads as follows: "We wear the mask that grins and lies." Of all the quotes for a teacher to have on her wall, this one strikes me as strange. I begin to wonder why she would post it here in the classroom on the wall opposite the door. What masks does she think she wears or her students wear? Is it metaphor or teaching tool? Does she use it because it is technically multicultural? Or, perhaps she just uses the poster to decorate her sparsely decorated classroom. These thoughts and questions excite the researcher inside of me and boost my researcher's confidence.

On the white board, the listed essential question, though not a question, reads as follows: "The relationship between Jimmy and Crab." The word *characterization* is written underneath it. The lesson appears to be about how the author uses characterization to create unique characters. While I am not overly familiar with the tenth grade curriculum, I know teaching characterization is a standard at the high school level. A quick glance around the room and I notice that textbooks, both American literature and tenth grade literature books, decorate the floor of Amanda's classroom. Paper balls and wrappers as well as about three soda bottles fill in the spaces where students have walked, sat, and learned. Stuffed under the desk and around the desk are the shards and fragments of one hundred or more students. The class is messy. I am not one to talk too much about such matters, since my room is generally cluttered and in need of a good dusting, but this room is disheveled to another degree. I wonder if this is any indication of

the way this class is managed. The new carpet that the school installed this school year is stressed by the eating and drinking that Sarah allows in her classroom. A custodian somewhere in the building is not going to be happy about the look of this room.

A few minutes later, Sarah walks in bouncing. Her auburn hair and her height make her a formidable presence. Her smile, though, belies any fears that her stature might produce. She begins the conversation enthusiastically. I am glad. She states,

"Hey, sorry, I am late. I had to go run an errand."

"It's okay. I was just looking around. Curious."

"Oh, you see the mess, then."

"It's not too bad. You should see my room." My room is messy, but not this messy. I am conscious of the recent nature of our strained relationship, and I want her to feel at ease as we begin to discuss her background, my main focus of the day, so I try to ease her mind about the messiness. She sits behind her desk. Papers of what looks like a quiz, and her computer with the gradebook program open are what she attends to first. She begins to pack up and tells me to get going because she only has about fifteen minutes before she has to leave to pick up her kids. This was not our original agreement, but I am eager to begin and not willing to anger her. A nervous interviewer, I begin somewhat clumsily, asking her about growing up in South Georgia. She states,

> And I can't remember the current demographic, but when I was there, I didn't even know what the word racial minority meant because it didn't exist. There were no minorities in my school. (S.Farley, personal communication, February 8, 2011)

I try to hide my surprise, but I think I may have been transparent. "It didn't exist," I offer.

The room seems quieter now. I am challenging her a little. I just do not understand the comment. She responds slowly and methodically. She is more guarded now, and she says,

> Yeah…the white people and the black people were split almost 50/50. We didn't have any ahh Asian students. We had some ahh mixed race students. We didn't have any Indians. When my brother was there three years later, we did begin to have an Indian influx…but not while I was there. So, the dichotomy was obvious. It wasn't like there was mixed kids running around either." (S. Farley, personal communication, February 8, 2011)

Listening to Sarah's words, I cannot help but think about my pilot study in which my subject, another teacher at Topeka High School, also knew my topic. Consequently, every time I walked into the room she mentioned Maya Angelou or something she thought was multicultural. Her references seemed out of place and disjointed. My being in her class threw her off balance and made her suspicious. In the same vein, Sarah knows that my dissertation has something to do with race, so I cynically wonder if she his mentioning this because of my topic, or if this is really the first memory she has when she thinks of her home town in South Georgia. Does she always fixate on race when she thinks of her hometown?

When I think of Savannah, Georgia, I do think of race, but the first idea that comes to mind is the historic district or my grandmother's flowers. My hometown is different in some ways than Sarah's. I am aware of this difference as I listen to Sarah describe the rural background and the facts that her mother did not work and her father was, and still is, a successful truck driver who is gone most of the week on long routes. In contrast to Sarah, I did not have a father for much of my teenage years, but I do remember, much like Sarah, having a strong, stable female force in my life in the form of my mother. As Sarah talks, I am aware that

Sarah and I also share other pivotal life experiences. Sarah describes literacy moments in her early childhood and loving to read. Because her father was not in town, her mother read to her religiously she notes. She answers my question about these literacy moments with a smile upon her face. She states,

> My mom read to me all of the time. I can't remember a time she didn't read to me. She said that she would read to me and I would wake her up in the middle of the night to read the same story and that I would notice when I was 2 to 3 years old if she skipped a page. And, I would tell her that she skipped a page. She would get mad and read it. (S.Farley, personal communication, February 8, 2011)

We laugh at her insistence to have the book read as it was meant to be read. Thinking of this moment, I remember my mother always reading books to me, and although I cannot remember stopping her to go back and reread a page, I do remember her rewarding me for reading silently for several hours during grade school. Perhaps, most vividly, I remember my mother allowing me to buy books at the book fair every time our school supported one. When the books were delivered to the classroom, I remember these little trinkets improving the entire school day. I also remember a host of *Weekly Reader* magazines in school and being surrounded by a reading culture which promoted comprehension and diligence. The individuals in my family wanted me to be a successful student. Books were part of that equation. School was the most important step in achieving any goal, especially for my grandfather who worked forty-three years for a pulp mill in my hometown. He would have bought me any manner of educational tool if he thought it would further my future opportunities. He knew that his eighth grade education was not much in a world where computers and jet engines are commonplace. I remember vividly my

grandmother buying books about the presidents and an entire encyclopedia set to further my schooling.

As we talk, Sarah voices similar memories. I listen as she mentions her mother's reading habits and her desires for Sarah:

> My mom didn't read. She wanted us to read, but she didn't read. She saw it as a ticket for us to get out the poverty. It was so prominent there. It was really like…middle class for us was really upper low class. And that is the way we break down the haves and the have nots. (S.Farley, personal communication, February 8, 2011)

We talk about this connection and her involvement in the drama club and the marching band as well as my obsession with basketball. In a similar fashion, we were both involved in The National Honor Society as well as other clubs that demonstrated our interests and our awareness that colleges looked for involved students over students who chose to be uninvolved. We were both rewarded for our involvements, and though Sarah does not mention it, I suspect that this why both of us won scholarships outside of Georgia's HOPE scholarship Sarah earned a free ride to a local community college, and I earned several scholarships, too, but not quite enough to have my tuition entirely waived. For the next twenty or so minutes, we discuss Sarah's perfect score on the high school writing test and her scholarship to another collegiate institution in north Georgia after her associates degree was attainted and my graduate school scholarship to Clemson University. We are, I reflect during the interview, privileged to have these doors opened for us, and the connection of both of our parents reading to us and the importance of education, as stressed by our parents, is not missed on me. Having read Tim Wise's book *White Like Me* (2008), I see the doors that were opened for us as privileged moments that gave us access to more moments. After our interview, I am interested in what doors were opened for Sean and

John. Are we all alike in that doors scholastic doors have opened for us because of our whiteness? What exactly is the role of family and literacy in our academic success?

Sean

As a teacher, Sean is a creative force. He is known by many of the teachers in my department for his ability to break rules and get away with it. In the eight years I have been working at Topeka, he has never shown up for graduation. Although graduation is not technically mandated by the school staff, attendance at graduation is noticed by the principal. Sean would prefer to worry not about this demand on his time. Today is Wednesday, and Sean has on his jeans, but he is not wearing the Relay for Life sticker that teachers can buy. This $10.00 pack of stickers gives Sean and other teachers the ability to wear jeans throughout most of the spring. All of the proceeds earned for this fundraiser go to cancer research. I suspect that Sean has not paid to wear the jeans. He is just wearing them because he knows he can get away with it.

Walking into his room, I see his classroom is sparsely decorated—a few older Apple computer posters with revolutionary thinkers on them adorn the room. Einstein, Gandhi, and Emilia Earhart are only a few of the famous faces on the wall. In the corner, near the busy white board with lots of writing on it sits an Aztec poster. Other posters include World War II posters—they are newspapers, and they announce certain pivotal events of the war. One headline listed on these mock newspapers suggests that the war is over. Much of the writing on the white board suggests that Sean uses his white board as a means to keep up with his classes. It is part a teacher reminder perhaps and part a student reminder of due dates. Also, on the walls he has some student work posted, and he has four commandments of writing posted on the wall. They are as follows:

1. Thou shall write from the heart;
2. Thou shall write before you write;
3. Thou shall write small;
4. Thou shall write real.

Even though much of his room has the appearance of a history classroom, Sean's writing rules show his unique view of writing as well as his focus on the craft of writing. The rest of the room feels more like a history classroom. Knowing Sean as I do, he has probably decorated just to decorate. He is not one to worry about the ornamentation of his room or the proper nature of what is on the wall. In conversations with him in the past, he has told me that these decorations and examples of student work on the wall are not really worth the time and effort required. He views our principal and school district's focus on displaying student work and student standards as interfering with his teaching. Deeply independent, Sean teaches as his convictions lead him, and he only asks a select few for help. I am one of those people, and I know him well from being in a makeshift teacher band with him and from talking with him over beers about students and the world of teaching in general. His professional development occurs at a bar more frequently than it occurs during a teacher workday. His questions about teaching are incisive, and his observations about the profession are often balanced and introspective. In terms of professional development, some of my best conversations about teaching have occurred with Sean after school in restaurants. Today, I want to talk about him growing up in Bremen, Ga. When I enter his classroom, he is writing an email to an angry parent about their child's inability to turn work in on time.

"You ready to be interviewed?" I ask, knowing that it is very likely that Sean has forgotten my interview. As nice as he is, Sean can be a little unfocused on the details. This may

be one reason why he is on a Professional Development Plan (PDP). Sean is known for not turning in paperwork and failing to meet administrative mandates.

To my question, he responds, "In a minute…I need to finish this email." Frustrated, he relays to me the story of the student and the mother. Apparently, the mother has been told by the student that he did turn the assignment in and that Sean lost the assignment. This parent accusation has been used against Sean before, so I wonder who is in the right here. The rumored reason why he does not teach seniors anymore is that his assessments were so inconsistent that senior parents complained about their children failing. He finishes the email as we talk a few minutes more about the situation. When signaled he is ready, I ask him about growing up in Northwest Georgia in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. He states,

> It was. It was a lot simpler than it is now. Although I would hesitate to say that those were simpler times then. You know. I think it had a lot more to do with me being 8 yrs. old. You know…and things were a lot simpler then. It has nothing to do with location necessarily. What I do notice is in terms of difference in locations. I do remember going to the grocery store and ahh and my mamma stopping to talk to everyone in that store. Oh, that was so and so. And, I knew a lot of people too. I knew their grandkids. When I I got in trouble in school which was often, the principal would call and ask for Glenda. And, he would say Glenda your son has done this again. Blah, blah, blah, well, I just don't know what to do with him. At the time, I was really bored. And, and, especially in high school when you want to grab life by the balls and really just give them a good ring and you can fly out and do your own thing. Ummm. I really wanted to leave town and I really resented living in a small town. And I longed to travel. One of my dreams—half jokingly—was to open up a Chick-fil-A in Ireland. Just stupid

> stuff like that. But, basically, I wanted to do stuff elsewhere. Looking back on it. I really kind of miss those days. I drive around Cobb Co., and there are a lot of cars everywhere. And, its traffic jams and people pull out in front of me, and nobody says anything to me at the store. And what not. It's odd when I run across someone with a southern accent at Kroger. (S. Watson, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

"A true southern accent?" I remark. Sean loves southern accents and southern food. He is very open-minded, but he loves the traditions of the rural culture in which he grew up. He drives a big black truck and talks about shape note singing in small southern churches near Alabama. So, a true southern accent means something to him because it reminds him of being at home. It is comfortable and familiar. He continues his train of thought:

> A true southern example, and as an example of how language feeds into it and ahh, I talked to the lady who runs the self-checkout kiosk at Kroger. It as the morning time, and I had nothing to do. She and I got to talking, and eventually, we got to talking about Christmas time and what the kids got. It made my day to talk about totally inconsequential things with this lady who was running the kiosk. I never stopped to talk to her before. She was awesome. I grew up with the Sewells and Hubbards and I remember talking about a family by its last name. (S. Watson, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

I ask about literacy moments, a topic that I approached with Sarah. Similar to Sarah, Sean mentions a mother who was important to his literacy development:

> My mom definitely read to me. I remember Sesame Street storybooks being read to me every night. That was a big treat. I remember looking at the pictures. I remember spaceships that would go along with the Twilight Zone episodes I had seen—Star Trek

> and Star Wars and what not. I remember um, I remember ah. I remember mother in particular teaching me big words. Who knows why? But she ah, it was the day we moved from our house on Bryant Circle to Chestnut Street. And ahh, I remember her holding me, and we were talking to the guy who drives the mover truck. Now keep in mind I must have been maybe three years old and ahhh, I remember her asking me to explain metamorphosis to this truck driver. I remember telling this truck driver what metamorphosis was. You know, I think back and I wonder if I really knew what I was saying or if I was just parroting. It doesn't matter, though. The point is that she was trying to teach me certain fluency for logic. She was trying to teach me process. It doesn't matter what a butterfly is, but here is a process. But, um, I remember her doing that. Yeah, lots of storybooks. Um, I remember going into the living room, and ahhh, remember flipping through the big family Bible. The ahhh Mason family Bible and reading. (S. Watson, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

He continues for a few minutes discussing his mother, an R.N., as well as his grandmother's penchant for storytelling. He is smiling as he talks about the encyclopedias his grandmother had. I certainly share this memory of having encyclopedias at grandmother's house. The memory is dear to his heart and he explains why:

> I remember going into the living room at my grandmother's house. Mee maw had an encyclopedia of World War II that she had gotten from my grandfather and this thing was probably from the early 1970s or early 1960s. I would sit there and look through every book. It had full color pictures and schematics for all of the Panzer tanks and all of the Spitfire airplanes. Typically, what would happen is that I would go into the living room to look up something in the encyclopedia which we had and could barely afford.

> We had a full two volume with the appendices and all. But, typically what would happen is that I would go in to look up one thing, and I would emerge from the cave with my eyes squinting. I would emerge from my cave of learning after an hour and a half. Oh, this picture is also in it. Um, and also with storytelling. Mee Maw told a lot of stories. And momma always told a lot of stories. I would sit and watch all of the adults tell stories. I had neighbors…we grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of elderly people. I would listen to them tell me stories about stuff. It was sort of a very common sort of thing. I am going to knock on Jules back door, you know, and hopefully she will give me an ice cream sandwich. And all I have to do is sit down and listen to her talk for half an hour. (S. Watson, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

This sense of community and place is something Sean discusses a lot in his classes. It is foremost on his mind today. I have heard him talk about it before.

Like Sarah, and indeed me, Sean has strong memories of literacy events when he was a child. While he is more detailed than Sarah in his memories, the connection among the three of us is striking. This thread of connectivity goes deeper, too. Sean tells me about going to Governor's Honors, a statewide program for elite students, in Vidalia and how that experience changed his life. I am interested in this because I nominate students for Governor's Honors every year, and none of my nominations ever go to state. I do not think I have actually ever met someone my age who was a more than just a nominee for the program. Reportedly, the best and brightest from our state go to this camp. To me, this speaks volumes of Sean's talents in the literary arts. Like Sarah, who scored a perfect score on the writing test, he was definitely the top of his school and more appropriately his state in terms of academic ability. I am not as

decorated as the pair of them, but I did get my share of scholarships and tuition waivers to universities.

With a basis for understanding Sean, I walk out of his room comparing the two participants. Sean is different than Sarah in a lot of ways, but like Sarah, he does not describe himself as financially privileged. Sarah's love books and her writing ability are also intriguing. Her support system is much stronger than many of my students, I notice. I cannot help but think that Sean and Sarah might have been successful at schooling because they learned very early how to play the game of schooling the way it was set. For now, though, my mind is actively engaged in the above connections.

John

As I pass by Sarah's room, I notice she is talking to John. John is her co-teacher, and I am aware that he will need to be addressed in the process of writing this dissertation. His presence in the room influences the way she teaches, and it offers another lens for me to look at white privilege in the classroom. As a man in his 50s, John is from a different generation. He is white and from the Bronx. His take on education, I muse, might be a little different than that of the other participants. Generationally and geographically, he offers yet another way to tell what is going on in Topeka High School. I pop my head into Sarah's room and ask John if he wants to do an interview later in the week. By the look on his face, I get the impression that he does not appear too excited about the idea, but he agrees, telling me he has nothing to hide. This appears to be the major impression of him around the school, especially among his co-teacher colleagues. I have never worked with him as a co-teacher, but if it is indeed true that he is relaxed as a co-teacher, then my observations will corroborate these rumors. We schedule the interview for

Friday in my room. Sitting in the only chair I have ever seen him sit in while in Sarah's room, he says he will be there early.

On Friday, he sits in on my stool in the front of my room. We dispense with the pleasantries because for the most part he knows about my study. It is 8:00 a.m., and I have students who want to come in and talk to me. So, quickly, we move into the interview. I begin with a few questions about teaching. I am interested in understanding his reasons for being an educator. I ask him why he wanted to be a teacher. He replies,

> When I went to Columbia, I wanted to be a pharmacist. But, I was in this classroom. And looked around at all these kids who are as goofy as could be. Pharmacists. You know what I am saying. We were sitting in these labs, and I said that ain't going to work for me. Okay. What do you like to do? Well, I started reading early. 8th grade umm…I picked up *Les Miserable*. And my father said if you read you don't have to do yard work. So, I went from there to Shakespeare. And, I left Columbia, and I said I have to do something. Or, I'll get drafted. I like to read. I wanted to do that. I wanted to be a sports writer. Everyone thought that was crap. And, it was. So, teaching. So, I went to Stonybrook. It was on the edge of Long Island. It was for Jewish kids who couldn't get into Ivy League because they wouldn't work hard. They got a brand new Corvette, and went to Stoneybrook instead of going to Ivy League schools. (J. Starling, personal communication, May 18, 2011)

Interested in the idea of John's having money, I move off the paper away from my ten or so questions, and I ask if he had any money growing up. I am looking to see if he had the financial privilege that the other subject did not have. It is an intrusive question, but it has intrigued me, so I ask it, and he responds after a moment of thinking:

> No money at all. I got a Regent's Scholarship out of New York. My dad made too much money, so I couldn't get this money. He said when you go to college good luck. You don't live here anymore. He started out as a watchmaker. He fixed watches and time clocks. Then he moved and worked in a factory that made big coffee pots. Big percolators. Ummm…he made good money. In the beginning, he didn't make good money. He worked his way into mid management. I took out some loans, and I stayed at Stonybrook, and I had real good teachers there. Lewis Simpson. He was a Pulitzer prize winning poet. He used to double date with Dylan Thomas. I had a guy who won a Guggenheim. He wrote on Milton—books. (J. Starling, personal communication, May 18, 2011)

This pedigree of teachers and the mention of scholarships is more than I thought I would receive from John. I have not heard him talk about this before. Admittedly, I am largely unaware of his background, even though I have worked with him for four years. He is a little more of mystery to me. Generally, he arrives at school before 8:00 a.m., but secludes himself by sitting in his room and reading the paper. I listen spellbound as he talks about quitting a school in the Bronx after the first day of teaching because a student pulled a gun on a fellow teacher. I am happy to get this information, and it completes the picture of my participants. Overall, my participants were a successful group of students with access to education and little financial means to do so. They also appear to be driven internally and to have had a support system to give them encouragement and opportunity for something beyond their immediate surroundings.

Dewan

For the purposes of this study, I have added Dewan to the cast of characters for this is his story, too, and through Dewan's story, I think I am able to sharpen my autoethnographical

lens and look into my own struggles with teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Our stories are intertwined and representative of a place along the continuum on which white teachers and their diverse students interact. Dewan's story is not uncommon, and I believe it sheds light on my own failures as a teacher as well as the failures of other teachers—some of whom are well intentioned and desire to help their students of diversity.

Today, Dewan has his head down on his desk, and he will not wake up at my urging. I have called his father recently, and his dad promised to try and help Dewan focus. He admits, though, that Dewan wants to drop out, and he thinks that Dewan might have given up because he does not see any way that he can pass. Dewan is tired today, and he is uninterested in my class on the Holocaust. I am talking about Maus I*, specifically, a graphic novel which highlights the journey of Art Spiegelman's father, Vladic, in the Auschwitz prison camp. To me,* Maus I *is interesting read, and I cannot help but contrast my own junior year with Dewan. If a teacher had offered to teach a graphic novel to me, I would have been overjoyed and thought that the teacher was the coolest teacher in the world. Dewan is not so easily won over by me or my lecture notes on the history of the graphic novel. He is slipping through the cracks, and any netting that might catch him is too far removed from Dewan's interests and desires. I am frustrated with the situation, and he is clearly bored in my classroom.*

When the bell rings, Dewan continues to sleep, and I have to wake him. Dreads flop over the desk and his jeans baggily sit in the middle of his seat, a sure dress code violation, but with Dewan's proclivity for falling asleep in class, I have consciously made an effort to overlook the dress code violation in favor of keeping him in class so that he can at least make an attempt to pass. He has spent at least two days a week in In School Suspension (ISS) for the last few

months. Baggy jeans, texting, and a blatant disregard for the rules of ISS keep Dewan out of my class. It's a vicious cycle, and days when he is in class, he sleeps.

Reluctantly, I enter into the routine of waking him again. Today, a gentle nudge rouses Dewan. Sleepily and red eyed, he stumbles off to his next class. I follow for a moment out of curiosity, and I notice that he goes two doors down to Sean's class. Sean is one of the participants in my study and my interview for today. I am not completely sure why Dewan is taking another English class, but more than likely if Dewan is taking English class from a sophomore teacher, then he is behind in credits. He is a junior—or he should be. I make a note to ask Sean about this during our interview at the end of the school day. Maybe, we can discuss Dewan's lack of enthusiasm and come up with a plan. Like most students missing credits, Dewan has an RTI (Response to Intervention) file, but the team assembled to help Dewan rarely meets. For most teachers, RTI is another responsibility to check off and to attend. As an intervention strategy/program, RTI is ineffective as we use it at Topeka. I'm not even sure I know who is Dewan's case manager is at this point in the year. If Dewan is working and participating in Sean's class, I might be able to find out what works.

To be clear, Dewan is not a participant of this study in terms of the interviews and observations, but he participates in the larger experience of this study because he is the student who represents in some ways the failures of public education. In a large and important way, he represents my failures too. Dewan does have a personal responsibility to assist himself in passing his classes, but I must also take some measure of responsibility. Even though Sean and I are two doors down from one another and share Dewan, as I recently noticed, I forget on a daily basis to make Dewan the priority he needs to be. Frustrated by my own workload and my four

preparations for my students, my RTI file, and my familial and graduate school obligations, I let Dewan sleep and disappear into the catacombs of ISS.

On the day I interviewed Sean the second time, for example, I forgot to ask him about Dewan. We moved through the interview questions, but I forgot the most important reason, or what should have been my most important reason, for going into his classroom. Talking to Sean about Dewan might have taken ten minutes, but this is a student who I have let slide again. It is inexcusable, but it speaks to my priorities I think and perhaps my weariness with Dewan's attitude. As a qualitative researcher, I have been trained to question everything. Is there a subconscious reason or a more overt reason that I have not pursued Dewan's lack of motivation with more vigor? Have I given up on him? Have I talked myself into being too busy to deal with a student who doesn't appear to have the motivation to even pay attention to my excellent lectures? To what degree have my pride and ego interfered with Dewan's lack of progress?

These are unsettling questions, but they document my struggles with Dewan, who is probably the most challenging student I have come across this year. He is never disrespectful; he is just not interested at all. My teacher feelings are hurt by his apathy because students like my class generally. I receive compliments about this from time to time from parents and administrators. I am a former Topeka High teacher of the year, and to some extent, me teacher ego is bruised by Dewan's lack of interest in my class. Admittedly, every academic year a couple of students tune me out. These students are not always African-American, and they are not always male. This year it just so happens that Dewan meets both of these criteria.

He is also, I should mention, part of the school improvement plan. Not him exactly, but African-American males are targeted as a school wide initiative to improve test scores. I'm skeptical of this initiative because I personally think my school is using Dewan to better its test

scores. Dewan's—and students of the same ilk—overall development is not a primary concern at Topeka; however, Dewan's test scores and the ability of these scores to get the state off of the school's back is the major concern. These are my thoughts about what is happening to Dewan and to students like Dewan. Uninterested in school, they are pawns in a much larger game than I think they see. I might be wrong, though. Dewan's refusal to do work might be indicative of him understanding the game. He is a smart student. I think that is why his disinterest nags at me so much.

Seeing the Reflection: Narcissus and the Self-Absorption of White Teachers

One of my favorite myths as a child was the myth of Narcissus. The myth tells us, and it varies depending on what version one reads, but generally the accepted story is that Narcissus, a beautiful young god, rejects the nymph Echo, who after being rejected, disappears into hiding. Having angered the gods for this rejection, Narcissus is punished; consequently, he falls in love with himself while peering into the depths of a pond. He dies trying to get closer to his reflection, a sight that he could not live without. Thus, our modern word *narcissism* enters the lexicon, meaning, of course, to be vain. I think what I love about his myth is that it explains two phenomena—how an echo came to be and the origin of a word that I rarely can spell correctly. The myth serves as succinct reminder of the creativity of Greek culture as well as their awareness of self-infatuation and its dangers.

The myth of Narcissus has great relevance to my dissertation study and stands metaphorically for what I see is going on in the classrooms of the white teachers I talk to and observe, but more importantly, the metaphor indicates a paradox which the literature on whiteness reveals to be present in schools in America. By being the most visible in terms of a literal teacher workforce, white teachers, as I mentioned earlier, are invisible to themselves.

That is, they perceive their classroom impact on students to be minimal or always positive, and certainly, many of them never see their own whiteness to be problematic. Because of the inability to perceive the possible negative impacts they can have on their students, their impact is much stronger and perhaps more pervasive (Hytten & Adrins, 2001). Additionally, white teachers perceive their whiteness as normative and essential because as Lin (2008) acknowledges their beliefs and attitudes relate to how they have lived. White teachers allow these perceptions and understandings to permeate their classrooms, and because of their own invisibility, white teachers underestimate their ability to see beyond what they deem as normal. The power and privilege embedded in the mainstream White discourse, reifies and perpetuates its dominant quality (Bersh, 2009). In classrooms, this reification of whiteness happens consciously I am sure, but oftentimes, it happens unconsciously as the normal operation of schooling. In effect, white teachers teach as they were taught without regard for racial designations in the classroom

In school contexts, whiteness does not require white teachers to deconstruct what it means to be white because whiteness operates within accepted classroom norms which are reinforced by the institutional settings of schools and school boards as well as state legislatures. Thus, it is easy for a white teacher to be narcissistic because the lens by which he/she views the world of the classroom is a lens of personal experience, and that lens is institutionally reaffirmed in schools by testing and policies which uphold this lens. This lens is problematic for students from diverse cultures because it is ultimately not their lens. To be fair, white teachers understand their identity in relationship to their diverse students in their classes along a continuum (Helms, 1995). White teachers fluctuate within this continuum, and according to Lensmire (2010), white teachers can even care about students, but they may be ignorant about the negative impact their whiteness has on students.

Stuck like Narcissus with the reflection of their experiences as a student and as a learner, the white teachers in this study consistently told their stories during pivotal moments of text reading or of writing without letting students discuss their own stories. In many cases, Sarah was particularly myopic about her assignments, choosing Georgia Standards and her own experience over those of her students. A believer in letting students write what they want to write, Sean was not as egregious as Sarah in his classroom tunnel vision, but he did often tell his stories as segues into novels or short stories; he rarely asked for student input or for student storytelling in these moments, and he did often see himself as the enforcer of rules in the hallway. In all of the cases listed below, the monolithic construct of whiteness was upheld by the teachers who assumed that their experiences spoke for the class and for the student. They assumed that one's life experiences were generalizable. In American, different racial minority groups have different experiences than the majority. These experiences of the racial minority students continue to be relegated to the periphery of the classroom.

I saw this self-absorption in Sean when he described his reason for teaching. Thinking about his undergraduate days, he stated,

> Maybe, part of me wants to say that I just had a fear of growing up. The other part of me is why I would want to graduate from college. Every class that I take is really cool. I'm learning stuff and I know how to work the system. I know how to put in the effort. Ummm, so that is what I did I graduated and declared my major and as graduation approached I said what is it that I am going to do with this. I could write a novel. But, then I thought well I do not know how to write. And that was a lot of work. Since I don't know how to write, and I want to get by with the least amount of work for the most amount of pay. I want to be a teacher. What was it that I loved to do? I loved to talk

> about books. Like, I loved discussing poetry and literature and writing with other people. And I like to show my ideas to them. And I like sharing my ideas, and I like having my mind blown too. I like people. Like, I'll be the cool teacher. Well, I could teach. Teach college. Well, hell, no. That's too much work. You have to do research and write papers. I hate that. You gotta get your work published, and I think that is stupid. So what about high school? Well, cool. (S. Watson, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

The above excerpt was taken from an interview I conducted with Sean during the infantile stages of my dissertation project. I thought as I listened to him discuss his motivations for wanting to be a teacher that mine were not that different. I, too, entered the profession in order to talk about books with people. I get paid to talk about books, and I get my summers off. I remember thinking sign me up for that gig. I do not know if I had thought about the workload as Sean had. I had no concept of what it meant to be a teacher other than being in a class with many of them during my academic career. I remembered even foolishly saying at one point that the best practice for being a teacher—I think I was a second year teacher at the time—was having been in a classroom. Years later, I realized that the physical, intellectual, and emotional journey of a teacher was more difficult than I ever knew as student. Early on, I also romanticized the concept of teaching books to students. Even today when I find a book that completely changes the way I think about the world or a particular culture, I share it with my students. Several of my students will generally call it boring or stupid. I think the reason for this is that a lot of my students are different than me; they are excited and disappointed by different concepts and ideas than I am.

As the quote above suggests, Sean had a particular worldview that brought him into teaching. He talked about loving books and poetry. He also mentioned his love of sharing ideas

and being impressed by ideas. His preferences were not athletic or mathematic in nature; he did not mention video games. Animals and cars were also absent from what he says he loved and why he chose to go into the profession. These omissions were purposeful because he had a particular set of interests. These interests fueled his passions and his academic interests did not enter into the realm of social studies, for example. Many literature teachers I know, in general, fall into the unconscious self absorption in their own likes and dislikes in terms of a literature choices. Sean, for instance, mentioned in an interview that he loves the works of John Steinbeck or of O' Henry. While there is nothing wrong with these canonical authors, Sean's chosen authors reflect a worldview that differs from his racial minority students.

In one observation, Sean stated the following: "Ya'll might not think this is interesting, but I think it is very interesting to learn about ancient cultures." Applebaum (2007) notes that white teachers teach from a dominant worldview which excludes others. Sean's exclusions were obvious as he shows his video about Greek culture. In the video, words such as *presocratic*, *western civilization*, *Socrates*, *achievement*, and *greatness* were spoken by a white narrator. The implications were obvious for any student in the room watching this video: greatness equals the pinnacle of western invention and civilization found in Greece. Sean's focus on *Antigone*, the larger goal of his unit, was a type of privileging that unabashedly argued for a cultural identity which reflects whiteness and, as the video mentions, the greatness of western society. Sean, as Castagno (2009) argued, was conducting his class as if multiculturalism never existed—a business as usual model.

This focus on whiteness was most prevalent in Sean's class in the manner in which he viewed his students. On several occasions during my observations and interviews, I noticed that Sean struggled with his students wearing their pants below the waist—sagging as the students

call it today. On one particular morning when I was preparing for my classes, Sean walked into my room and asked what I would do if I ever caught a student sagging his pants. He continued by asking me if I thought it was weird that he did not want a boy's butt crack on a desk that would be another kid's desk next period. Busy on the morning he asked the question, I hastily responded that I probably would do nothing as it does not really bother me. On the morning we were talking, he walked out and returned to his business.

Later that day, we returned to the incident in an interview. Trying to get him to talk about the way he sees himself in his classroom I asked him a leading question. I asked him about his personal classroom agenda. He replied,

> Yeah, sometimes I tell a kid to pull his pants up because he is in the presence of a lady. I say it again and again because I want to be the voice in their head. (S. Watson, personal communication, April 24, 2011)

This last statement troubled me at the time because it presupposed that the white rural voice of northern Georgia matched with the voices that are in the student's home. Sean represented authority and assessed his students based on his view and his world, which he candidly admitted was not diverse. Sean's familial and cultural backgrounds were not the same as that familial and cultural images which some of his students had internalized for the entirety of their lives. Sean's act may always be in the student's head, as Sean desired, but it might also be in his head as an adversarial reminder of Sean's class—perhaps even a reminder of why he hated school. Sean's reaction here indicated what he found important, and Sean devalued what a student identifies with in terms of dress. To go back to the metaphor of Narcissus, Sean asked his students from diverse backgrounds to look into the lake and see him—not themselves. Sean's holding fast to the rules of no sagging was only one indicator of the way he viewed his racial minority students.

I should point out here that Sean is adhering to the school dress code policy, but this dress code policy implies that certain cultural expressions are not allowed in schools.

On another occasion, when I observed his students working on theme projects for *Antigone*, a play which Sean enjoys teaching year after year, I had the opportunity to informally talk to a student named Tevin. While talking to Tevin, I discovered that he had failed Sean's class on two previous occasions. He said he has read *Antigone* each time. When I asked Sean about this in a later interview, he described his relationship with Tevin in terms of family:

> He and I bicker like a father and a dad. It has a lot to do with his own relationship with his dad. It comes out in our relationship. But, umm, I think he has a dad who expects a lot from him, but does not go forward and say let's talk about why I grounded you for two reasons. And, I want you to understand that that is separate from my personal feeling for you. It seems like I am smacking you this way and that way, but believe me it is a protective maneuver. He and I have always been like that. He has a seat and sits up front I always ask him at the beginning of class to move up to his seat. I put him up front so he won't get into trouble. Well, today he just put his head down and slept the whole class period. So, I put tape down around him like scotch tape. So, when he got up it was funny. Yesterday, when he moved up here he said oh, dick. I said did you say dick? He is like yes. I said okay I just wanted to know what to say for the write up slip He knows exactly what to expect in this room. (S.Watson, personal communication, April 24, 2011)

Sean continued to say that he did not think Tevin hated him and that he liked having in his classes because he thought Tevin would more than likely do worse in the class of someone else who did not understand him. Tevin never voiced these same feelings towards Sean when I

talked with him informally, and he did say that he was okay with being in Sean's class. Tevin did not seem to mind being in the class for multiple years.

Sean and Tevin had a relationship that was antagonistic at times. I noticed this exchange on another day when Tevin was asleep at his desk. Sean asked Tevin to get up from his desk, and Tevin replied with a dreary "I'm tired." In response, Sean told him to get up and that school was his job. This exchange exemplifies the nature of this antagonistic relationship and Tevin's lack of interest in the class. Sean told me that Tevin would probably take the class for a third time next year. Sean's view of Tevin as the screwed up son whom he believes he was correcting by enacting rule oriented behaviors did little to help Tevin pass the class. The disconnect between father and son was clear. Howard (2003) acknowledged that this stigma is often wrongly placed on African-Americans males and other minorities, causing an overrepresentation of these males in remedial classes and special education classes.

Moreover, Sean's belief that he was saving Tevin from other teachers and being a dad runs parallel to the white savior myth that so many white teachers and Hollywood like to champion, but as Reyes and Rios (2003) stated, there is a certain romancing of this notion in film that is absent from reality. During one of our interviews when I asked about Tevin, Sean told me that he keeps him around because he is afraid that other teachers would be tougher on Tevin: "Could you imagine Tevin in Marshall Smith's class? That would be a recipe for disaster. He would write him up for putting his head down daily." Clearly, Sean viewed himself as helping Tevin in a positive way, but Tevin's grades and his motivation did not reflect the attitude of one that was in the process of being motivated to pass a class. He may like Sean, as he acknowledged, but Tevin failing Sean's class did little for Tevin's chances of gaining a diploma and bettering his life. While I do not know the relationship that Tevin has with his father, I did

find it interesting that this student was not responding to Sean's write ups or his talks. Sean's metaphor of the father and son relationship was normalized, again, through his version of what a father should be and should do, and it was inaccurate to assume that Tevin needed him as a father figure. Tevin's grades and his obvious boredom reflected the fact that he was not being assisted by Sean's attempts—no matter how noble they may have been.

Moreover, Tevin and his classmates had stories which are welcome some of the time in Sean's class; while reading stories and while studying *Antigone*, for example, Sean's stories always took precedence over that of his students. On several occasions, I observed Sean's storytelling at the beginning of classes. When reading "The Interlopers," a story by Saki with a central conflict of two feuding families, Sean began with this anecdote: "I'm from Bremen. That carries certain territorial stuff with it. I'm a Ridley. Folks in Bremen know what that means. We are fiercely independent and pride ourselves on that."

Without explanation, Sean allowed this quote to enter into the atmosphere of the classroom. Asking about other student understandings of territorial fights might have encouraged an interesting debate or discussion about this topic, but Sean closed this door for students like Tevin. In doing this, Sean showed a preferential treatment for his own storying over that of his students. Of course, his students knew feuding and resolutions, and a ripe opportunity for connecting to this knowledge existed for Sean during his reading of "The Interlopers," for as Esposito and Swain (2009) suggest, good teaching should connect students to their home culture. Such stories would be interesting points of recollection for students as they reflected upon the decisions of the characters in the story. In the particularly revealing moments of the climatic ending of "The Interlopers," Znaeym and Ulrich von Gradwitz, the dueling protagonists, resolve

their differences before their surprising demise. Sean's students miss out on the opportunity to share their stories about conflict and resolution.

Sean also wanted to argue that his students as individuals were more similar than they are different:

> I ahhh I get a little freaked out by ahhh quote unquote multiculturalism because on a practical level…we ultimately want a society of people we are all on the same page with. And ahhh to try and instill quote unquote diversity does the opposite of what the goal is. It diverts people and focuses on differences instead of similarities. If what we are doing is trying to look at similarities among people's unique experiences, we need to be focusing on people as individuals instead of as groups and clubs, memberships, teams. (S.Watson, personal communication, April 4, 2011)
>
> Perhaps the most important thing I think…hope…that they learn is that despite all our individual experiences, we humans all go through the same fundamental things…disappointment, betrayal, tests of faith and loyalty, etc. (S.Watson, personal communication, April 18, 2011)

While Sean's observations are true at the molecular level, they do not hold true culturally. From a cultural standpoint, Sean's insistence that everyone had more in common than what they have different encourages teachers to assume that all students learn and understand the same way. This mentality also assumes that students have no cultural basis for connection. As Irvine (2010) notes, teachers who care about their students seek to access the cultural knowledge which that student possesses. Understanding and equanimity come from this desire to understand what students know.

In Sean's class one day, I observed two of Sean's African-American students discussing a particular story that had African-American characters. One of the students noted that he loved a particular story that the class was looking at because it had a black character. These students wanted to see themselves in the literature they read. White students and African-American students do, of course, understand the universality of failure and sadness, as Sean argued, but these emotions might possibly have different nuances in different familial or cultural contexts. Sadness at being arrested for one's skin tone, for example, involves an awareness culturally that one's existence is subject to harms that others, namely those of the dominant culture, do not have to endure. Teachers and school policies unintentionally promote this dominant ideology every day. The directions, for example, of the Georgia High School Graduation Test ask students to not write in rap or in another language. The message of this test is clear. Dominant culture is capital and the one universally acknowledged experience in America.

The students in Sean's class understood the importance of seeing themselves in literature, and no doubt they understand the message of the Georgia High School Graduation Test clearly, but Sean's own version of the white teacher as savior myth and his preference for his own storying celebrated Sean's preference for this own worldview and his inability to see outside of his culture. In effect, as Hill (2009) argued, Sean asked his students to choose a dominant culture identity that differed from their own.

In many ways, Sarah's viewpoint intertwined with Sean. Not as talkative in interviews as her counterpart, Sarah revealed smaller glimpses of her fixation on whiteness. The quotes from our interview were revealing:

> And I can't remember the current demographic, but when I was there, I didn't even know what the word racial minority meant because it didn't exist. There were no minorities in my school. (S. Farley, personal communication, April 2, 2011)
>
> No, no, I know that things happened because it happened in their neighborhood, but it was like subdivisions where it was the hood. It was the hood and we didn't go there. And they didn't go to our neighborhood either. They didn't go to the farm. (S. Farley, personal communication, April 2, 2011)

These two excerpts from Sarah underscored a worldview that like Sean's offered a momentary glance of the world in which Sarah grew up, a world which informs her understanding of racial minority cultures. In the first quote, she acknowledged that the South Georgia town she grew up in, by her estimation, was roughly fifty percent black and fifty percent white. Thus, she believed that racial minority is a word of which she was largely unaware. From a contextual sense, she might be right, but in the larger milieu of Georgia and even the United States, Sarah's statement was extremely optimistic and faulty. In the same interview, she continued describing her first encounter with minorities in her honors courses while she was in school:

> Umm, I don't remember my first encounters because it was completely mix raced all of my life. Not mixed race, but you know...all classes and races were together. But, we were in the tracking. And there were only two black girls, and they were known as the two smart black girls. They were in all of our classes. And, they were the main ones, and it shocked me because they were Democrats. And, I didn't understand why they were Democrats, and I thought it was a black thing. Because, they were the only ones in the whole group that were black. (S. Farley, personal communication, April 2, 2011)

Even though Sarah did not recognize that minorities existed in the larger view of her community, she noted that the racial minority students in her classes challenged her to think about a different political point of view. Outsiders, these two girls were labeled by Sarah and her white classmates as the two "…smart black girls."

In interviews, Sarah discussed the separation of neighborhoods typical of small southern towns and her not knowing the way the racial minority students in her school lived. Even though she argued that she had a good rapport with racial minority students on Friday nights because she was in the band and they were on the football field, she said she heard about the happenings in their neighborhood sometimes, but she never witnessed any of the community's behaviors.

This superficial understanding of her classmates and her football acquaintances followed Sarah into the classroom years later. One of the more lengthy units she taught during the period of my study was Walter Dean Myers' book *Somewhere in the Darkness,* and the book offered some further glimpses of Sarah's worldview as a white teacher of racial minority students. *Somewhere in the Darkness* is a popular young adolescent text about a young African-American boys trek across country with the father he never knew. During the course of the novel, the reader learns that the father has recently escaped from prison and is dying, and while he may not necessarily be guilty of the crime for which he is incarcerated, he is unable to clear his name before he is shot by the police. This book reflects the troubled realistic bond between father and son that one would expect a long absence to incur.

When I asked Sarah why she chose to read the book, she mentioned two reasons that are noteworthy for this discussion on whiteness and worldview. To begin with, she noted that she chose the book because it did not focus on Ebonics. She reasoned that this would not hurt the writing of her students as she prepared them for the Georgia High School Graduation Writing

Test. In the same interview, she mentioned that she chose the book because it meets the criteria for the school improvement plan a Topeka, and she figured no one could blame her, if she taught the novel, for not doing her part to meet the improvement goals for the school. Still the individual who did not recognize the democrats in her classroom and who thought they were strange and foreign to her experience, Sarah did not understand that the way her students spoke represented their own cultural awareness (Delpit, 2007). Her statement of what was normal talk suggested that her culture and her way of teaching writing enforced the normalcy of her white classroom. In doing so, she chose, like Sean and I, a cultural expression which disregarded the home cultures of her students.

The implicit assumption Sarah made was that a student must choose one over the other in order to be successful in America. The last statement that Sarah mentioned was the most troubling. She believed that she should meet the criteria of the school improvement plan because she feared blame. Her belief that she should meet the needs of these students because the school requires it hinted at a larger belief that she did not need to read these texts to connect with students or to understand students; instead, it suggested that she only taught the book to appear as if she was in compliance with the school improvement plan. Blame, not care, was her obvious motivation for creating the appearance of diversity in her classroom. As problematic as blame can be as a motivator, Sarah's assignment did not follow the original intent of the school improvement plan, which attempted to raise test scores through cultural awareness of black males, specifically, in all classes. Even if the plan was badly implemented across the school, this plan appeared was created with students of diversity in mind.

In other ways, Sarah addressed her students as unworthy of her time. Habitually tardy to school and not known for her planning of units, Sarah drew a line between her family and her

students. In an interview with Sarah, she revealed to me her lack of motivation for her students and their learning. Sarah told me about her mother's thoughts on her work ethic before she had kids:

> When I went home this past weekend, my mother and I talked. I said how would you describe me now. She said that I was a workaholic. And, I was offended. Maybe in my early 20s, but not now. I have changed in the last five years…just being a parent and having to decide. I am not going to work so much. (S. Farley, personal communication, May 1, 2011)

By placing her blame on her own children, Sarah validated her lack of preparation and her late arrivals to school. During the course of fifteen weeks, I walked into her classroom and asked her what she was doing with her students on many different days. On four different occasions during her sixth period class, her last class of the day, Sarah told me that she was not prepared for what she was doing during the period. Admittedly, Sarah was in a busy phase of her life. She was recently divorced; she had bronchitis on several occasions this year; and she was getting married in the summer of 2011. The merging of the two families had been time consuming for her. All of these factors contributed to her decisions in the classroom, and they impacted her ability to assess her students' progress well:

> With so many absences and I had sub work, I didn't know what the kids did and didn't do. So, the grades were inflated…because of this. If they did it, I entered a 100. If they didn't, I gave them a zero. But, I didn't have the attendance record either. Because some days, I had three different subs in a row. So, that pretty much inflated all of the grades. (S. Farley, personal communication, May 1, 2011)

Even though her students were all affected by her decisions, the students most impacted by Sarah's decisions were the students who were most culturally misaligned with her class and the school system in general (Hyland, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Sarah admitted to me that she never took work home, and she spent that time being a mother. This was a noble gesture and a good indicator of her familial focus, but her own students suffered due to her stresses as a teacher (Black, 2004). I am guilty of this as well, and I bet a lot of teachers are, especially the teachers at Topeka with younger children. Striving to find balance is difficult when one is balancing kids and students.

Continually, Sarah's students were also underestimated by her professional judgment. On several occasions, I witnessed how she and John worked together. During one class, I mentioned to Sarah that I was doing a qualitative project that would need interviews and observations to arrive at a complete picture of her classroom. She responded that I would not see any qualitative work in this classroom. Her meaning, though she misunderstood my statement, suggested a lack of confidence in the abilities of her students. Her co-teacher was more overt with his underestimations of their students. He frequently made statements in front of the students that could be construed as disrespectful. On one particular occasion, he suggested that a student should get used to saying asking for fries with that because that would be his future, and in another incident, he told one of his students through a quick retort that he was unable to think deep thoughts. Although these statements were meant as a joke and not necessarily directed at racial minority students, they set a certain tone and are quite revealing portraits of their collective attitude. Racial minority students in this environment internalize these messages and become prey, once again, to the institution of whiteness and power (Bersch, 2009).

In a reflective journal entry about a lesson she taught on *Julius Caesar*, I asked Sarah to tell me what she hoped that her students learned from the play. She replied that she hoped t hat they learned "…leadership, [about] peer relationships, [and about] dealing with fear and jealousy…high school drama in another words." When assessing the students in her classroom, though, she asked comprehension questions as well as factual questions—never allowing students to delve into the possibilities below the surface of the text. Sarah refrained from the student responses and the deeper level critical thinking questions that might have really forced students to connect the play to their lives and to their own cultural contexts.

Other assignments continued to contain the same types of underestimations. During a poetry unit, which Sarah confessed to me she was excited about teaching, Sarah told me that she always started with asking students to write together and then she allowed them to write on their own. Throughout my observations of Sarah's teaching of poetry, she discussed many different times how she was excited to start the unit. I did see her allow for a class poem and an individual poem, but on one particular class day when they finished the poetry unit, Sarah's co-teacher wrote on the board the following:

1. Ten lines
2. Couplets
3. Simile
4. Personification
5. Onomatopoeia
6. Alliteration

Obviously, Sarah did not choose the topic for the students, but she limited the creative ability of her students by forcing their writing into specific parameters. She wanted to teach them to write good poetry while teaching them the poetic elements necessary for the graduation test.

Throughout the poetry unit, she taught these terms for the culminating assignment to be created with these terms in mind. However, the poems I witnessed which were written with this list in mind were written with the goal of meeting the requirement of the terms and not the goal of writing something that reflected the depth of her students experiences. I worked with several students during the course of this project and each time the students asked me questions about the terms, and all of the students I worked with stopped at the ten line mark.

One student, who was an African-American male interested in rap music, decided to write about chickens because he said that would be easy. While we were working together his questions to me were solely about the terms, and when he finally got to the tenth line of the poem, he stopped. He never used prewriting or revising strategies to increase the rhetorical value of his poem. His concern was meeting the superficial goals of the assignment not to explore who he was an individual within the larger framework of society. Through observation and interview, I could tell Sarah was aware of the fact that poetry offers her students a vehicle through which she can allow them to tell their stories, but she was hesitant to do so, choosing terms as the sole method to teach the craft of poetry. Unfortunately, she underestimated the richness of their cultures and their families are discouraged for the terms she, a self-proclaimed closet poetess, desires for her students to know. In doing so, Sarah missed out on the richness of her students' thoughts and stories, and she has traded these stories for poetry that was less engaging and more formulaic.

Sarah also underestimated her students' ability to openly discuss race. While reading Walter Dean Myers' *Somewhere in the Darkness*, Sarah asked her students to explore certain themes. On her white board, she wrote themes she wanted to discuss. As mentioned earlier, the book touches on themes of race and parenthood. Sarah told her students where to find information about race and divided them into groups. Students found information on the themes, but when time came for the students to discuss the theme of race—and all of the themes for that matter—Sarah told them exactly what the book said about race. She stated that it Crab, the father character, keeps having white man's dreams because he is dreaming about the archetype of all white men not being racist. These dreams occur within prison, and although Sarah's interpretation of this is surely open for her to discuss, another way of reading Crab's dream is that he might want what he perceives to be the easy life of white men, which he notices in the story often have cultural capital. Sarah's discussion of race is one-sided, and in my experience with her class, I think her students would have enjoyed a deeper discussion about race. Sarah did not provide for such conversations, though, because she believed herself to be the literary and cultural authority in the class.

Vignette 3 A White Teacher's Honesty

Dewan has dropped out my students tell me. His failing grade in my class and the rest of his classes, including Sean's class, influenced his choice, I believe. But, I haven't talked with him in a week. He didn't even tell me that he was dropping out of school. He didn't show for two weeks, and then the rumor circulated that he was in jail. One of his friends in class started that rumor. He came back for a day, and he never showed up again. I asked him about the jail rumor. Dewan denied it, of course, and I believe him. He seems too smart for jail, especially in terms of his relationship with people in authority. I have seen him text when I asked him not to,

and I have seen him refuse to go to ISS, but I wouldn't necessarily count these actions as criminal. Many students text, and most repeat offenders in ISS try the game where they dare ISS to come and get them. Students get tired of all of the isolation, and even though they nap frequently in their cubicles, they do hate the silence of ISS and lack of socialization. Even though I have never talked with Dewan about this I suspect that he is finished with the ISS game and the failure game. Like Tevin, Dewan has repeated a lot of classes, and I think he feels helpless.

Truthfully, I feel a mixture of guilt and relief that Dewan is gone. My guilt stems from my lack of contact with Dewan's parents and my inability to reach him. I have rarely had that happen in my eleven years of teaching. I remember the first student who considered dropping out. Felix, a white student, talked with me about it for quite a long time. At the time, Felix was working at the local movie theater. He thought he would work there and eventually join the military. A conscientious student in terms of assignments in my class, Felix had major attendance issues which contributed to him being so far behind in school. When he was at school, though, he wanted to make up his work. I think he did want to graduate for awhile. Regrettably, he got behind in math and decided he didn't want to play the catch up game anymore. In Felix's situation, I can't remember a mother being easy to contact or father even involved with Felix's life. I remember specifically the frustration I felt when Felix finally dropped out. I knew, even as I know now about Dewan, that Felix had severely limited his options. He had become a statistic, and I felt that his life would be extremely difficult for the duration. As much as I fought for Felix to stay, I didn't fight for Dewan. I am not sure it would have mattered, though. The major difference between the two students is that Felix tried to do his work. Dewan did not. He shut down very early in the school year, and I'm not sure how this

relates yet, but Felix was white. I can't fully say that Felix's ethnic background is the reason for my effort; I think it has more to do with Felix being my first drop out. I might be in denial, though.

My measure of guilt, though, is balanced by my relief to some extent. It's not a feeling of relief in the sense I never want to see you again, but it is relief because the RTI meetings and the constant attempt to encourage Dewan to do his research paper or to stop cutting Tim's computer monitor off in class is over. At times, teaching Dewan was--if I were to be honest—difficult and exhausting. In the RTI meeting with Dewan's father, we discussed how Dewan could earn his half credit this semester with a solid effort. Dewan's father promised to wave the keys to Dewan's future vehicle in his face. He felt like the truck that Dewan wanted so much might be the needed answer to Dewan's poor motivation. Obviously, that did not work. Somewhere along the line we have failed Dewan—the RTI committee, the father, and the English teacher, and even Dewan has failed himself to a degree. I know that this reasoning is false because I will not necessarily work harder because Dewan is gone nor will I be more focused on my lessons for the rest of my students, but I reason I do have one less student who needs my attention, and I try to comfort myself with this line of thought. It feels horrible to think these things about Dewan, but my thoughts are my thoughts. I'm the type of person that will try and try, but I also like students to meet me halfway. With Dewan, I never felt that he would help me understand what he needed. I'm sure more inventive teachers could have reached him, but for now, I carry some guilt, knowing that I could have done more---maybe, even made another phone call.

Coincidentally, my eleventh grade class, the class which Dewan attended, is watching Dead Poet's Society *at the time I get the news that Dewan is not coming back. While watching, I think about how I love Keating. In particular, I have always loved how he singlehandedly saves*

the boys from the trappings of the path that has been laid out for so many of them. Keating as a savior is an incarnation of the savior myth that is so prevalent in films about urban children as well as white children. Exceptions to the white teacher saving the lost urban kid exist in teacher films, but the pervasiveness of the white savior myth honestly was one of the reasons why I joined the field of teaching. I don't think I was aware of it at age twenty-two, but I thought, and still tell my students, that Keating is my idol. I like his ability to look at the establishment and fight for what he sees to be the necessary lessons for the students. If I were to be transparent, I think I also like his ability to be liked and to be the one teacher who stands out in the sea of average teachers.

The situation with Dewan has made me think of some reasons why I need to reconsider my love of this film. To begin with, Keating saves the students ostensibly to make them think for themselves in the face of system that is antithetical to their individual development. The scene at the end of the film where Dr. Noland comes in and asks the boys what they have primarily covered in class exemplifies this well. After discovering that they have studied the Romantics, Noland asks the boys to turn to the Realists section of their book. His intent is to bring them out of the individualistic notions to a more concrete reality. My hero worship of Keating is idealistic and inspiring to me every year when I place the VHS into the VCR, but Keating teaches future doctors and lawyers with a strong support system at school and home. Dewan may be a doctor some day, but the odds are significantly against him, especially now that he is a drop-out. He doesn't have the support system from which to grab vitality or the ability to dream above his reality. Keating's scenario as teacher is thus unrealistic for my diverse classroom.

The other sobering lesson that the film brought to me this time is that I am not equipped to be a savior. A few years ago, Felix taught me that. For me, my failures with Dewan are real

and problematic. They are a troubling reminder that I do not reach all of my students, and even if I could be Michelle Pfeiffer in the movie Dangerous Minds *or Hillary Swank in* Freedom Writers*, the reality is that I would not necessarily save my students. Maybe what those students need is to not be saved. The image of salvation, as I use it here, suggests that there is something wrong intrinsically or extrinsically with Dewan. I am not sure if that is the case. Public schooling has failed him in some way that I will never fully understand. Maybe, our system is broken, and students like Dewan struggle because they truly don't fit into the framework we use. The myth of the white savior is, therefore, troubling, and as much as I romanticize Keating and his job, the reality is that my students are not given a script to read and their lives do not necessarily have the safety nets that the wealthy kids at Wellington have. Although it is primarily conjecture, Dewan's opportunity to make a better life for himself may have been forfeited when he dropped out of school. I am left wondering the weight of what my presence might or might not have done in terms of his making up his mind to leave school a year early. How much of my relief in his leaving did he perceive as not caring? I may never know the answer to this question.*

Formidable Concerns: The Challenge of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Teacher 1: Look at this. Can you believe that he plagiarized again? Every year I tell my students not to plagiarize, and they do time and time again. I tell you the more I work here the more I see that these students are not prepared for the things we want to teach them. Then, they want to argue with me telling me that I am wrong. They don't see the issue with plagiarizing. They have been doing it for years, and nobody has ever said anything yet. Why do I want to hate them and give them grief they ask?

Teacher 2: It's almost a generational thing. They think that they can borrow anything they want without giving credit. It's kind of like downloading songs or whatever. They see very little with getting something for free. Web 2.0 in a way—things are shared not owned.

Teacher 1: Right, I guess. The longer I teach the more racist I become, I tell you.

(Teacher one exits.)

Teacher 2: (inner thoughts) I'm not sure it's a race thing, and I suspect that the issue is more of a generational thing. I didn't see that coming—he's the least likely to say something like that. I always thought him progressive.

(Teacher 2 continues to run copies. Curtain closes.)

The above play excerpt is based on a real scenario I witnessed while working on my dissertation. The part about the teacher talking about becoming more racist happened, and the teacher involved was a white veteran teacher. This scenario paints a convincing picture, I think, that race still influences classroom teachers. This scenario also underscored the need for cultural relevance in the classroom. For a teacher to be truly culturally relevant, the teacher must see outside of his/her worldview and see the potential in recognizing different and diverse cultures in the classroom. As I have demonstrated, the white teachers in this study were often unable to see beyond their perspective. They stumbled upon or created assignments that approached cultural relevance at times. McGee Banks and Banks (1995) noted that for teachers to be equitable in their pedagogical choices that need to be reflective practitioners. Both of the participants in this study demonstrated these characteristics at times. Sean, for example, mentioned wanting to reach his students and to grow them as readers and thinkers, and Sarah, though primarily focused on standards, was able to articulate in interviews that some of her assessments were poor and needed to be rethought. Thus, the teachers of this study articulated to a large degree that they

wanted their students to do well. In fact, for the most part, the participants in this study had a good rapport with their racially diverse students.

Oftentimes, though, teachers are undertrained in ways to help racial minority students because preservice programs do not address issues of diversity thoroughly (Morton and Bennett, 2010), and while graduate programs may touch on issues of diversity, professional learning opportunities for teachers who do not attempt graduate work are often not effective in implementation (White-Clark, 2005). Even though the word culturally relevant pedagogy and multicultural initiatives have existed in educational forums for decades, teachers are underexposed to the possibilities and the pivotal nature of such instructional outcomes. Both of the primary subjects for this study approached being culturally relevant, but their attempts at this important relevance for students were frequently abandoned because of pressures inside and outside of their classrooms.

While observing my participants for the study, I noticed that they included students in their classroom discussions at times. Sean and Sarah both believed in the power of storytelling for their students. I noticed them flirting with the idea of giving students the power to voice their own experiences as students and members of a societal macrocosm. Sean was much more successful at this pedagogical practice, but to be fair, Sarah voiced a desire to do so at times during the study. What was most interesting, though, was that these pockets of student agency were almost always stifled by some internal or external force which relocated the power of the classroom back to the teacher. A pertinent example of this occurred on a particular day when I saw Sean teach a riveting lesson on characterization. Having discussed in his block class the reasons why we tell stories and why we need to hear stories, Sean decided to have his own students compose their stories. By any standard, this approaches cultural relevance, and it

demonstrates what Ladson-Billings suggested is a cultural competence (1995). Like so many of his lessons, this lesson had depth and texture for students, and this lesson assumed that student voice was important.

In the beginning, he asked his students to imagine the most interesting character they know of in their own family. As I observed him doing this, he asked me to do the same thing. I thought of my uncle who was definitely larger than life. Sean asked his students to think about their mannerisms and their voice as well as the stuff they would talk about in a conversation. The students thought, talked, and wrote about these characters from their lives. They worked vigorously for over thirty minutes, and for high school students, this assignment was a major pedagogical victory for Sean. There even seemed to an excitement in the air. Students were laughing and reading each other's works. In the classroom, there was a natural desire to read and edit as well, and I witnessed two students talk about a shared character. One of these students looked at the other one and said that he almost got it right, but he needed to write about his subject's crazy hair.

To be funny, Sean told me to get writing, too. He was on his game, and because his class was almost over, Sean asked me to come back tomorrow and share my piece on my uncle, who is by far is the most lively person I have ever known intimately. Nervous that my piece was average, I offered to work on it and bring it in to share with the students. Admittedly, I was interested in what the students had to present. Sean had given out the assignment as a piece of homework. He asked them to bring it in tomorrow, so that they could share their pieces. He called them sketches, and he went over what he expected of them. Based on the interest level of the students, Sean's lesson plan appeared to be working.

On Tuesday, the next day, I showed up with my written piece about my uncle. I had worked on it for about twenty minutes or so—making sure to flesh out my uncle's southern drawl and his mannerisms. Not a great creative writer, I was extremely diligent about my description for hopes that I get his students to see the larger than life country boy turned pipe fitter at a local mill. I was proud of my piece, and I believed the students probably shared my own enthusiasm. Mine had turned out to be a pretty decent character sketch. When I walked to Sean's classroom, he was talking about mood to his students. Puzzled, I mentioned over the beginning of a *PowerPoint* that I had my sketch. He replied good, and he said they probably will not get to them until the next week.

During my observations, Sean's class never returned to the characterization exercise. Sean's poor planning had something to do with this apparent shift in topics, and even though mood and characterization are pivotal for writing short stories and understanding them, Sean's shift indicated he might not have thought through the disconnect he presented to his students by changing topics. He had not only left the assignment completely, but even if he had returned to it in two weeks, the flow and tangible excitement of the students would be lost. In our last interview, Sean noted that he only plans minimally for each day of his class. When I asked him about this lack of planning he stated,

> Daily. I spend a good solid 35 minutes every day in the morning before school. I figured out what works. Sometimes it bites me in the ass. I like to go to Nick's and go week by week and plan. As I get close to the week, I space them out. When I plan, I am on point, dude. From early age, I grew accustomed to working on the fly. With folklore, it was why do we tell stories? Then, I asked why do we read stories? These questions came about because I was bored in class one day. I asked the kids why do we do these

> things. Life interjects in the classroom. Real world…instead of ignoring the question…let's talk about it. We write stories to share and get validity in live. We listen to other people and their stories to be entertained and to listen to other people and be dragged in their world. (S. Watson, personal communication, May3, 2011)

My observations of his class corroborated the fact that when he planned he did make powerful connections for this students, and he did get them to think about themselves and their place within the larger world. His teaching was pedagogically sound and reflective in terms of what he could do for students in those moments of preparation. Unfortunately, his lack of planning often undermined what his goals might be. The students do not appear to mind, but one of them did ask Sean about the assignment for which I wrote the character sketch. He replied that they will get to it. Unintentionally, Sean had shut down student voices and reasserted his power over the classroom.

In another very interesting lesson, Sean pushed his kids to make a reading timeline for themselves. The essential question that day was the following: "Why do we read?" Following through with this question, I witnessed Sean give his students the following directions via a handout. He wanted them to look into the past and think about all of the experiences they have had with reading. During his discussion, he reminded them that they had both positive and negative memories associated with reading. These memories—both good and bad—had an impact on their cultural attitudes toward reading. After this lecture, he gave them a handout, too, which thanked one of his former teachers for handing him the book *The Catcher in the Rye* a time when he needed it most.

I observed him continue his instructions by making the students list memories of reading that they might have had with a teacher or an aunt. Students talked about books and the class

buzzed with interest and stories—some of them funny and some of them quite sad. One student boasted that he had not read a book since third grade. This assignment, too, was never finished throughout the next couple of days, instead, Sean worked with the students on short story assignments which I did not witness him ever connect to the previous class. Although I never asked Sean about this in an interview, I believe that planning was the factor that most impacted his choice to abandon the cultural relevance of his original plan. Sean's "work on the fly" mantra did not increase his ability to thoughtfully plan, and his lack of a plan underscored his disjointed teaching at times.

Through observation, I did not witness Sarah to be more focused than her colleague. I have already mentioned how, on many occasions, she recalled to me the important life issues impacting her concentration on her lessons, and I have already discussed in detail her focus on being a mother and spouse. What I noticed, though, about her inability to be culturally important to all of her students, especially her racial minority students, was that she and her co-teacher continually were on different pages. During a computer lab visit, I asked the co-teacher what the students were doing, and he replied that he was not sure yet. Sarah had left the classroom, and he, theoretically, was in charge and had no clue what the students were doing. As it turns out, the students were working on drafts of earlier papers. Sarah discussed their method of planning in the following excerpt from an early interview:

> Yeah, we did [plan]. We planned for a few minutes after school every day. We would talk about what happened and what was going to happen the next day. We would never….I would work curriculum, and he was more grading. He graded all of the multiple choice, etc. He did all of that. He was very fast at it. I feared inaccuracy, but I never found it. (S. Farley, personal communication, April 4, 2011)

Clearly, the focus for this pair was more of a divide and conquer strategy. However, this plan backfired on days when students asked the co-teacher how many lines a poem should be for a particular poetry assignment, and John responded with the incorrect number. Students in Sarah's class often mentioned being confused, and during several occasions when Sarah and the co-teacher were trying to get instructions out to the majority of the class, I witnessed him tell the students one directive, while Sarah told them a slightly different version of what to do. After receiving both sets of instructions for the poetry assignment, a blonde haired girl in the back of the classroom noted that even math made more sense to her than this class.

The shortcomings of this lack of focus stemmed from the way these teachers discussed one another. Even though I never witnessed public infighting between Sarah and John, they clearly had vastly different versions of what the classroom should like in terms of pedagogy and the teacher's role. When I asked Sarah what her thoughts were on John's abilities as a teacher, she responded in the following manner:

> One of my students said, and I quote, that you know he is never going to get up. I think he does have a good rapport with them, but I think it is primarily fear based. If he doesn't like the student, they fear a joke at their expense. So, I think it is pretty impressive for someone who doesn't get up. But no joke, he never walked six feet from the door where his seat was all year. He only did it if I was out of the room. If I am in the room and there is a co teaching dynamic going on, even when I am behind my desk taking attendance, I never saw him walk past his chair.
>
> There were a few times after having a sub when I would come back, and there would be nothing done. He had done something different with our students the sub did with the

> other students. That being understood, that could be a valid statement. That's okay with me. I don't fault him for that. (S. Farley, personal communication, June 1, 2011)

Sarah was not enamored with her co-teacher, even though their classroom behavior was professional. She struggled with handling much of the workload by herself.

The co-teacher described himself differently as a teacher. In a long interview with him—one of the few pieces of data I collected of just him—he described his teaching as good, as good as Freshen County Teacher of the Year, Shelby Johnson:

> I would throw those worksheets and the glossary in the back of the book out. Kids know when you give them busy work. Let's take Johnson…she's on the other end. I'm just as good of a teacher as she is. She's sweet and nice, ummm….her style is different, but if you had to say if she is a better teacher than me I don't think so. I'm not saying there aren't teachers better than me. But Johnson…nawww. When she is not doing that back of the book stuff, she is a good teacher. (J. Starling, personal communication, May 18, 2011)

Later in the same interview, he discussed Sarah:

> That *Julius Caesar* stuff she did was good. Some of the other stuff she doesn't really want to teach. My friend Gale said I don't like teaching when we worked together. She said I enjoyed the rapport with the kids, but I didn't enjoy the teaching. You know, she enjoyed …she would do *Paradise Lost* and all that. And she loved to teach that. It didn't matter who was in front of her. To me, it matters who is in front of the class. I am more of a person thing than the material stuff. Straight college kids she was good. (J. Starling, personal communication, May 18, 2011)

The disconnect between how he described himself and how Sarah described him was obvious, and a lack of pedagogical respect emanated from the mouths of the two teachers. Even though Sarah often did say she appreciated the co-teacher's ability to grade papers and that she appreciated the fact that he helped with classroom discipline, she found it difficult to work with him because he never left his chair—a truism that I observed during my fifteen weeks of being in her class. Additionally, the co-teacher noted on one occasion that Sarah was too fond of worksheets and back of the book glossary work; he made sure to say that if that had been his class he would have done the worksheet assignments differently.

Not planning together and not respecting one another's ability to teach are strong indicators of the tensions I sometimes noticed in Sarah's class. When Sarah was absent one day, I talked with John about what the students were supposed to be doing. He told me that even though they were in the *Antigone* unit, Sarah had left the students some short stories to read. When I asked why, he told me that he was not sure. John understood *Antigone* and had been in the class for the reading of the play, but he depended on Sarah to make the plans for the class. The assignment sheet Sarah left the students had eleventh grade written on the top, and her class with John was a class of tenth graders. The assignment for the day had nothing to do with what the students were doing. The assignment was a busy-work assignment.

Moreover, I observed students using the teachers against one another. Sarah's students determined quickly who would give them the answer they wanted, and they played the game accordingly. Like parents being picked apart by an intuitive child, Sarah and John repeatedly allowed the class to divide itself along the lines of their favorite teachers. Sarah told me during an informal observation of her class that Shelly, a girl the co-teacher hated, would always come to her when she wanted to know something. Sarah reasoned that the girl would not approach the

co-teacher because they had a history of not getting along with one another. I witnessed, however, the opposite one day as well. One particular young lady sat in the back of the class and she asked Sarah a questions. Not liking the answer to the questions, the young student, who was asking a question about the test, decided to ask the co-teacher. He gave her a different answer than Sarah did. As a result, the young lady shut down and refused to do the assignment. She felt frustrated and irritated that she could not understand the work before her.

Indeed, poor planning and tensions within the milieu of the classroom affected teachers and their ability to be equitable to their students. During my observations and interviews with the participants of this study, I noticed that Sarah was hesitant to advocate for her students in the face of her co-teacher, who refused to go over assessments with students in class. Sarah noted that he did this because he did not want the conflict that might have occurred by students angry about assessment scores. Sarah told me that she never liked that about him, and as a student, she always wanted to know exactly what she did wrong on assignments.

This practice of not offering students a way to understand the mistakes that were made on their individual assessments was never amended while I was in the classroom. Sarah also allowed her co-teacher to distract her students with jokes that were irrelevant to the lesson and disruptive to her teaching. Because she was the primary giver of information during the course of this study, she led class discussions and dictated the focus of each lesson. Often, the co-teacher, thinking he was keeping the class lively, sidetracked her lectures and moved the entire class into a few minutes of random and trivial conversation. This excerpt revealed the distraction I witnessed, and Sarah's inability to redirect her co-teacher and her students:

"Cody, sit down," John begins playfully.

"Mr. John, did you ever have a girlfriend?"

"Back in my day, I had a couple."

"Ahh, man," Cody laughs.

"Yeah, let me tell you something about girls, young man…"

This conversation happened during the middle of the reading of *Julius Caesar* and continued for at least another three minutes. Students laughed at the interplay between teacher and student, and multiple conversations erupted, leaving Sarah behind her desk with nothing to do but watch. This lack of advocacy for the learning environment created a negative classroom learning experience; it also created a classroom which was divisive, and importantly, John's distraction damaged the focus of the lesson. Cartledge, Singh, and Gibson (2008) noted that chaotic environments are particularly difficult for learners who were identified as a racial minority. John's discussions were diversions for everyone involved.

Sean, Sarah, and John planned poorly for their classes, and the paucity of planning specifically impacted the diverse students in the classroom. This lack of planning goes against what Gay (2010) believes needs to be a committed focus to reach students from diverse backgrounds. Gay suggested that teachers should prepare for a "…diligent struggle" (p. 246) in the classroom and personally. I never witnessed the struggle of the teachers in this study. More to the point, they never discussed a struggle when planning for their racial minority students because they never planned for them or for their success.

Vignette 4: The Not So Transcendental Me

I'm preparing for my Transcendentalism Unit. I love teaching this unit. American transcendentalism is an engaging journey into American independence and non-conformity. The best and most quotable writers of my American literature course are featured in this unit. I mean there's Emerson, Thoreau, Chris McCandless and few other song lyrics by Eddie Vedder

and Supertramp In my mind, it's the most interesting unit I teach all year. It's easy to plan, I reason; we'll read some transcendental authors and discuss Chris McCandless. We'll read Into the Wild. The students will be wowed, and I will assess them by letting them attempt their journey into nature or non-conformity.

Or, I could let them decide about something that needs to be changed in their community, their church, or their school. They'll have to demonstrate that they get transcendentalism by taking the movement a step farther—that is, they'll have to move it from the whining about the way the world is against them phase and ultimately fix the problem they observe. A student, for example, who notices that their school bows before the inevitable money that comes from the vending machines and the trap that this lucrative endeavor creates might petition the principal to provide healthier and more reasonably priced snacks. This would enable my students to become social change agents and advocates for something that they care about at this point in their lives. As my friend Jennifer put it the other day, this will allow them to maybe stop being consumers of culture and maybe become doers. The assignment could be culturally relevant, or it could be social justice motivated or some combination of both.

At this point, I am pleased with my ideas and willing to implement them. I want to be a mover and a shaker in my school and show my students that the world needs them and us. On a Monday, I drop the idea on my students in my 1st period class. They seem eager and excited, and I feel like I have taught them long enough—almost a year now—to pull this unit off. There were only a few snarky teenager comments. By my barometer, this is a good sign.

Even though I am excited about the proposition, the month is March, and I am aware of the approaching standardized tests and the yearly pressure I feel to either teach to the test or to abandon the test for what I know is sound teaching. I have been conducting a dissertation study

on culturally relevant pedagogy, and I have a unique idea to make my students find and attack an issue they deem relevant in their neighborhood. The feeling creeps in, though, that I need to make sure these students have the best test scores in the school. The meetings and the emails start, too. For me, the feeling is akin to presenting in front of teachers or college colleagues. My palms sweat nervously when I receive the emails, and we begin, in our grade level meetings, to prepare to cram our students and to look at data. Around the county, principals pull their ties a little tighter, and they finally begin to walk down our halls and come into our classrooms. I am reminded of Foucault's panopticon. Surveillance is the name of the game now that the testing season is approaching. They watch me, and in turn, I behave like the good little boy I am supposed to be. None of that teaching outside of the box stuff. As is always the case, I begin to doubt myself as a teacher, and in my grade level meetings, we talk about using USA Test Prep, a software program that my school bought to help students with testing. I nod in consent. I have my marching orders from my department head who has handed out information on how to sign students up for this program. The cognitive dissonance which accompanies what my mind knows is right and what my heart knows is wrong creates a knot in my right shoulder. I don't usually feel this knot often, but March is tight knot month. Let the pressure begin.

This pressure impacts my teaching of my perfect unit. I do the usual, and I work through Thoreau and Emerson as well as the connection of the Transcendentalists to the Romantics and the Dark Romantics. I teach Into the Wild, and we debate McCandless and his decision to leave society. The students are into it. For the first time in some of their lives, someone—namely me being a ventriloquist for the transcendental movement—is telling them to strike out on their own and think for themselves. In a matter of two weeks, they have gone from saying McCandless was

crazy for burning his money and leaving his rather affluent life behind to understanding why he made those decisions.

It is here that I crumble. Unfortunately, I reason, this unit has touched on the major ideas of the movement, and the students have thought deeply about the ills of conformity. I decide against the project which involved the community aspects that once excited me. It is too time consuming, and I still haven't taught my students about the Modernists or the post-Modernists—not to mention the Harlem Renaissance, my most diversified unit. The students seem disappointed, but we move on to the next unit. In the grand scheme of their educational life, I am probably not the only teacher to have ever presented them with an idea and not been able to follow through with it. It's what creative thinkers like myself do sometimes. We get excited about the possibility, but we fold under the reality. Besides, they met the standards as far as I am concerned, and that is all I am required to do. I end the unit with a very traditional test, asking them to discuss the themes of Into the Wild and to explain certain quotes that made Thoreau so important by my estimation. The scores are decent and the unit is checked off as a success. Another generation of students flow quietly down the assembly line that is education in America.

I would like to say that I am nothing more than a cog in a chain of cogs, and while that is partially true, I am aware of the cogs (and the system as it perpetuated). Yet, I do nothing. My diverse students falter and I repeatedly bow to the pressure that is the kinetic chain of cogs. I can't even personalize their educational opportunities because I am too much of a coward. Sure, I think about my own family and my two boys who will undoubtedly have a good education outside of the classroom because my wife and I have made that a priority. We go to museums and take trips, but what about those who do not get the benefit of this type of treatment. If I am the liaison between them and success, I am failing miserably.

The Subtle Relationship Between Power and Assessment

(Teachers are talking in a room after school. The room is neat with student projects posted on the bulletin board. A teacher is behind the desk, while a second teacher is sitting across from him at a desk. They are relaxed. Both teachers are white.)

First Teacher: So, yeah, we were working on poetry today (Camera zooms in on his face.)

Second Teacher: (Camera moves to his face.) Ohh, how did it go?

First Teacher: (Camera pans between the two faces for duration.) You know, I mixed it up with some rap and some Johnny Cash. They loved it. But, when I read the word nigger in one of the rap songs, a black student asked me to stop. He said he wasn't ready for that and that he wasn't comfortable with me using the word.

Second Teacher: So, what happened?

First Teacher: I kicked him out of class. He was insinuating that I was a racist. I'm not going to take that. I have worked too hard to be labeled as something I am not.

Second Teacher: You kicked him out of your room?

(Camera fades to black.)

While interviewing and observing the participants of this study, I had the opportunity to witness multiple assessments of students. As the short screenplay indicated, teachers often demonstrate power over students in a variety of ways, and while the above excerpt does not necessarily speak to assessment specifically, it illustrated a teacher's viewpoint of a student questioning the teacher's motives. The environment mentioned above, though not necessarily closed to all student input, was closed to student input. Assessment works in a similar way. During the course of my study, I noticed my participants feeling uncomfortable when challenged and, at times, placing their diverse students at a disadvantage because of their assessments.

The most egalitarian measure that teachers can do in the classroom is to give students the opportunity to perform according to their individual strengths. These performance assessments allow racial minority students, in particular, to showcase their strengths, and thus, racial minority students often score better on these types of assessments (Braden, 1999). A test, for example, about a Shakespearean play might offer students choices in the manner in which they respond to a question about the central theme. Students might be able to act out scenes or create web pages, and even video games, according to their own interests. Additionally, student might be able to elaborate on a theme in the play by discussing through video diaries how they see the theme in their own community. In all of these cases, the aim is for the assessment to be student centered. The unfortunate outcome of teachers not allowing for students to have voice is that a hidden curriculum often becomes the norm of the classroom. When this occurs, the teacher's knowledge and expertise is valued over that of his/her students.

In effect, a not so depoliticized system of rating and valuing students through assessment becomes the mainstay of the classroom. As Sari and Doganay (2009) note that a hidden curriculum in not necessarily academic, but rather it is the values and beliefs of a school or teacher which are passed on to students. Both hidden and overt at times, assessment determines what teachers find valuable and what the state curriculums find valuable, but assessment often does not allow students to demonstrate what they deem valuable. In many important ways, assessments can approach cultural irrelevance, allowing for teachers as well as local school boards and beyond to have absolute control over students and their classroom performances based on a value system that may not be intuitive to students.

While I witnessed multiple assessments during the course of my observation period and the participants used a variety of formal and informal assessments, the formal assessments,

assessments that count for the end of unit grade, were for Sarah always a multiple choice test and oftentimes a double assessment where students had the opportunity to do a project. When I asked her why she double dipped in the assessment pond, she told me that she knew her students would do a mediocre job. Thus, she placed another assessment on her students—generally full of multiple choice questions and essay questions—so that students could do better on their unit exam. Sarah argued that the second and more conventional version of the test was standards driven. When I perused the test, it showed me that this was not the case.

The reality was that the second test was comprehension driven—not skill driven like the standards. Questions about who stabbed Caesar and how many times does the soothsayer warn Caesar to go to the Capitol were common on the exam. These questions were more limiting than the projects which encouraged students to explore characters with diary entries and PowerPoint presentations. Consequently, Sarah did not ask students to connect to anything other than what she conceived of as important plot events. Students would have wondered down a path if she had left the door open for them, but for Sarah, the path of differentiated assessment was too messy. By assessing her students twice on the same project because her perception was that students would do poorly, Sarah's agenda became less skills driven and more comprehension focused. In doing so, she chose storyline over skills students will need in later classes and on different graduation tests in Georgia.

Additionally, Sarah assumed that the project work would be a failure. For these projects, she abandoned the work and gave students another assessment, claiming that she wanted to look at them holistically. While I was observing her classroom, I never saw her students receive their grades or their projects. Because the projects were more difficult to assess, they challenged Sarah to think about connections students would make in unorthodox ways. Her excuse for not

grading them was that they represented poor work. In reality, the project work reflected an individuality she which made her uncomfortable because it diverged from her own thinking. During one of our interviews, she voiced a concern about student individuality, stating, "They are trying to create their own lesson plans; instead of just letting the teacher just to deliver the message" (S.Farley, personal communication, February 8, 2011). For Sarah, individualizing lessons was messy and not quantifiable. For her students, however, the possibility for exploration could yield important understandings and confirm or challenge beliefs they hold. Sarah's hidden agenda, though, was to create a roadblock against such personal growth. She never mentioned being conscious of this agenda, but nevertheless, her students were limited because of her choices.

Sarah's students and their projects were intriguing in another way. Even though Sarah credited her co-teacher as grading frequent assessments, I witnessed Sarah on one occasion grade public speaking projects out loud in front of the class. During one example, Sarah asked her students to create a museum that met certain criteria. Among the criteria were multiple artifacts that the characters might have with them in the novel. The assignment was a living museum for any character from the book *Somewhere in the Darkness*. Sarah gave the students a few days to work on the project. Most of the students did not work diligently on their pieces in class as Sarah demanded, but a young lady named Diana finished early and asked if she could present the day before the project was due.

An African-American, Diana had to present with the body and mannerism of the main male character, Crab, in order to receive the full points for the assignment. Diana's presentation was animated and received the applause of her classmates. She was the only student in the class ready to present that day, but she did not have one artifact completely finished. As a result,

Sarah said that Diana would probably be docked a letter grade, and she told this to Diana in front of the rest of the class. When Diana asked why, Sarah told her that she did not have all of the artifacts and that her performance of the character was not believable. Sarah had no rubric from which to base this judgment, and Diana's performance received positive attention from the class. Diana's time and work were obvious to the students in the class.

One reason for Sarah's decision may have been that she and Diana did not get along. Sarah thought Diana was a class clown, and she showed off to get attention. I found out later in an interview that Sarah had asked Diana's mom to calm her down:

> I don't know if you saw me talking to her before class…he [, the co-teacher,] wanted me to think about how she could get out of hand. So, I called her mother and I talked to her mother and I told her that we were going to try and tone down the silliness for the last few weeks of school. The kids that are not as bright as she is. We need her to tone down so that we can give other kids some help. She bought into that without a problem… (S. Farley, personal communication, April 5, 2011)

During my classroom observations, I witnessed Diana answer questions, and Diana also offered to read out loud while the class was reading. She was active and vocal, but Sarah, who admitted to me that she liked an ordered classroom free of noise, did not care for the vocalizations and the portrayals of the young girl because they messed with her sense of structure. The arbitrary points for the project deducted were reflected in Diana's grade on her project. Diana was asked, in effect, to not be her animated self. At no time did I ever think Diana was a distraction, but Sarah clearly did.

Sarah's assessment of Diana told Diana that she did not know what a black male looked and sounded like. Sarah's background, as mentioned earlier, was not conducive to an intimate

knowledge of African-American males, and her assessment, therefore, of Diana was not of Diana's work, but instead, she assessed Diana's ability to adapt a culture that she knew in more depth than Sarah. Sarah's assessment also reflected her negativity towards Diana. Although not necessarily having Diana in mind, Sarah admitted in an interview that she struggled with black females. She always felt that her relationship with Diana was a power struggle, and she was glad the co-teacher was in her room to help her with that problem. Diana is a product of Sarah's hidden curriculum—a desire to silence the voices which do not meet he predetermined idea of how a student should behave in a classroom setting.

In other cases, Sarah took off points and added points to grades through a variety of unique measures. If a student turned in work on time, she gave the student extra points. Other students had points deducted because they turned in their work late, but they were able to earn those points back if they attended a teacher lead tutorial. However, not all students were allowed to attend Sarah and John's tutorial. Only the students who could stay after school and who had their work completed were allowed entrance. Thus, the tutorial was not really a tutorial in the traditional sense as students were not being taught how to do the work. They were in Sarah's room to pass inspection on their PowerPoints and their journal entries for the project, which Sarah essentially abandoned later. During the tutorial session, Sarah told them to pull out their work, and she would correct their mistakes and make sure that they did everything as she desired.

Neither adding points nor detracting points in this case assessed a discernable standard. Sarah took away points only to add them back for a few students who were able to make the only tutoring session she offered. Additionally, Sarah admitted that the trend for the projects was that students did horribly by her individual assessment; they were often corrected and assisted in the

thirty minute tutorial session so they met her criteria, and even the students who made the session did poorly by Sarah's on omission. Perhaps the most problematic element of the tutorial was that every student could not attend. Only students with the means to do so were allowed to earn the tutorial points. Thus, Sarah did not grant equal access to all of her students.

Sarah's students repeatedly asked how much did the assignments count in the classroom, and they often expressed concerns about what the exact details of the projects were. Sarah was unable on many occasions to show her students what she expected because she had no examples of posters or projects. Moreover, she never showed her students a rubric beforehand, so any assessments of their abilities often involved students blindly turning in work to her. No student ever called Sarah on the unfair expectations she dictated. In this case, Sarah chose when to distribute points and to take a way points, and according to my observations and interviews, Sarah made these choices arbitrarily and often in a manner that did not encourage students to achieve. In Diana's case, for example, Sarah, who admitted she struggled with black girls, took points away publically for a product that was, by my estimation, excellent. Sarah struggled to understand Diana's cultural presence and subtracted points accordingly. Because Diana was the only student who turned in work early on a project that would later be abandoned by Sarah for a traditional test, Diana was punished. Though her project was flawed in Sarah's mind because she left out one or two minor elements, she stood out to me as a strong student. Sarah's public evaluation of her work was not fair or balanced.

The most obvious power and curriculum relationship I witnessed occurred with what the teachers chose to teach for their lessons. Both Sarah and Sean admitted that they feel more comfortable with the curricular choices which are available for them within the department. These resources, though slim, include a textbook and few sets of canonical high school novels.

At Topeka, our department is canon-oriented, so most of the selections in the book room are common high school material. Sean focused on *Antigone* during my observations and Sarah on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Both of these texts came out of our world literature book, and they provided an excellent platform from which teachers could adapt or reconfigure the text to make more relevant to modern teenagers. *Julius Caesar*, for example, offers students a way to think about power relationships as well as betrayal and hubris. *Antigone* touches on the timeless classic ideas of how individuals fit into the idea of government. The participants of this study articulated the fact that they desired to teach these plays for the above reasons, but none of them made the connection that students might have something to say about these themes independently of Shakespeare's great observations on the topic. Also, neither teacher thought that students might want a text with a more contemporary vocabulary.

During an observation one day, Sean asked comprehension questions about Sophocles' *Antigone*:

> What did Creon just say? You are high school students. Pretend you are fifty years old. Think about the dichotomies we have talked about so much: state versus individual, state versus people. This county, too, was founded on rules. The U.S. is not that different that *Antigone*.

Sean's point was that he wanted his students to think about life outside of their own—that is, he desired for the students to relate to Creon, a white Greek king, and while students can relate to rules, they were never asked to connect to the rules which might hinder them as well as Creon's subjects. In this instance, Sean's students did not answer the question he asked. They looked at him blankly. He had to feed them with questions, and eventually, he had to answer the question for himself. Seemingly, Sean's students had a hard time putting themselves in the position of a

white King from a different country, and they had an even harder time seeing how that king and this story of stubborn girl with strong family ties related to their individual journeys.

For *Antigone*, Sean assessed the students using a modified version of Tom Romano's multi-genre project research paper. He asked the students to take a theme they had discussed and to write different genre pieces, as Romano instructs, to demonstrate knowledge of the theme. Therefore, students who chose the theme that individuals often find themselves at odds with society might write a paper about Antigone. The same individual could add a diary entry from Antigone to give her perspective of the events as well. Thus, the multi-genre project, as Sean taught it, was a way for students to compile, in effect, the different perspectives of characters to piece together a theme of the play by using different genres.

When I asked Sean how the results were for this particular assignment, he told me he was pleased overall, but he wanted more in-depth thinking to accompany the themes they discussed. Sean's students might have not thought at the level that Sean wanted them to, but one student, while I was observing the class, told me he would rather write about football. When I asked him why, he told me that he thought football was awesome. Other students made the comments that Sean's assignment was boring. On a day when I walked into the computer lab to observe the students writing about *Antigone*, two students quickly began to discuss Lady Gaga's new outfit and her new publicity stunt. These students voiced a tangible desire to connect and to write about subjects they enjoyed. They were excited about Lady Gaga, and they were bored by *Antigone*, as I discovered listening to their conversations. Both football and Lady Gaga have a lot to do with *Antigone*, and Sean's students might see those connections if he allowed them to begin with what they find exciting in their own environments.

In addition to writing about *Antigone*, Sean's students were assessed on this project and not given a rubric, though they were handed many examples the day before it was due. He felt that many of his students did glean from the text what he desired, but there were clearly other topics, which they wanted to discuss in their writing and topics that made the themes more current. While Sean did not use grading as a punitive measure, he used his power to assess students on a topic that he understood and that he had been passionate about since high school himself. His students, after a first read of the play, were asked to write about themes that might have been less obvious to them and graded by a teacher who felt like the connections of the play were easily recognizable.

The imbalance in this assumption created an environment in which the teacher was right, and the students were clearly the amateurs. In fact, Sean mentioned that same idea many time in interviews: "I have the degree on the wall. Trust me. I know what I am doing" (S.Watson, personal communication, April 27, 2011). Sean was resistant to any questioning about the nature of his reading choices and the reasons for his assignments because he believed the degree on the wall placed him beyond reproach. Consequently, he never assumed that his students had good ideas or important contributions for the *Antigone* unit. In doing so, he controlled the outcomes of the class, wielding his power of choice over the students. Their options were less democratic because they were assessed on Sean's favorite literature. The assignment also implied that Sean's knowledge base and expertise should be valued over what the students understand and enjoy.

Within the curriculum of both Sean and Sarah's classes, assessment choices were made. Much like my Transcendental unit, the assessment outcomes made both Sean and Sarah wish for better results. Sarah and Sean found that the project grades were not as in depth or as excellent as

they desired. Importantly, these assessment choices, though creative, showed Sarah's ability to use grades in a confusing and manner. Sean removed the power of choice from his students because he saw himself as an expert, but in making his assessment choices, he refused to see that the amount that he knows about a topic or text is only enhanced by what students can add to it. Thus, both of these teachers clearly had their own preference for their privilege and their lack of enthusiasm for their student's unique abilities. Assessment equals power and Sean and Sarah seldom offered democratic values to their students; consequently, they retained control and situated themselves as the authority of the classroom. Their students were positioned differently and because of what they valued in the classroom. The hidden curriculum of schooling at Topeka High School was monolithic.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

In this study, I examined the impacts of whiteness on racial minority students within the classroom. When the idea for this study became a reality, I was most interested in the interactions between teacher and student as well as the way in which two white teachers and a co-teacher attempted to navigate that gulf which exists between the dominant narrative of schooling in American and the often marginalized narratives of racial minority students (Evans-Winters, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Much research in the field of education has looked at whiteness and its impacts on students, but much of the literature in this field deals with pre-service teachers (e.g. Adair, 2008; Amos, 2010). The paucity of research concerning veteran teachers was (and still is) a concern for me. The specific aim of this study was to add to the literature base on this topic.

For this study, I used an autoethnographic angle in conjunction with my two original case studies to further my own understanding of my impact in the classroom. As a white teacher, I am not immune to privileging certain values or texts in the classroom. Thus, through case study and my own autoethnographic entries, I provided snapshots or stories of how whiteness impacts other classrooms with similar teacher-student dynamics. Ellis (2004) notes that autoethnographic forms "…feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed as dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing" (p. xix). I attempted to "flesh out" my observations and my dialogues with the participants and other colleagues in my school

through these written pieces. The presence of these teachers in break rooms and in the hallways speaks loudly, and I captured their voices and their discussions. I used a variety of different literary genres in my writing to creatively explain what I was noticing. This enabled me to answer my research questions. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the impact of white privilege on racial minority students in the school setting?

2. To what extent do white teachers activate the cultural and familial experiences of racial minority students?

Throughout the course of this study, I answered these questions through observations, document analysis, teacher journals, and interviews with the subjects.

Discussion of Findings

Throughout Chapter 4, I used storying to provide insight for the reader into the behind the scenes of Topeka High School. In doing so, I wrote vignettes, used participants' words, and utilized other storying techniques to demonstrate my observation and thoughts throughout the course of my fifteen week study. All of the written pieces placed in this dissertation actually occurred. They reflect many of the documented difficulties of racial relations in American education (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2010). I believed at the beginning of this study, and this dissertation has confirmed this, that white privilege was still pervasive in American high schools. The impacts of whiteness are not felt in the classroom alone, and as the research in this vein suggests the systemization of whiteness in schools can be seen in the conference rooms, board meetings, and administrative offices.

A critic of this research could suggest that this study reflects more of a power dynamic concerning students and teachers than it does a racial dynamic between teacher and student.

More to the point, a critic could suggest that the intersections of culture and race, as presented in t his study, could not be ascertained without interviewing students. Indeed, this is true to some extent, and as I will discuss the limitations of this study, racial minority students would have added much to this study. However, in the break rooms, classrooms, and hallways of Topeka, I heard comments that were specific to race, specifically the African-American race. The presence of these comments and what I learned in interviews and saw in observations suggest to me that race and power are partnered at Topeka. I do think that Sean, Sarah, John, and I all have the best interests of our racial minority students in mind, but we compromise these interests by not having the right training to explore how we could incorporate the familial and cultural capital of our students—that is, we are not frequently culturally relevant.

Additionally, Sean and Sarah resisted gearing their literature classes to cover diverse cultures because they did not deem it important. They both admitted to shying away from *multicultural*. The decision to not include other cultures or student individuality is based on their sole ability to choose for their classes, and while that is a decision firmly rooted in the power they possess over their classes, it is a decision that is exclusive of racial minority students in the classroom. Race and power are related in this study because teachers have the power to control classroom discussions and decide what is read (or written) in the classroom. In my case, I suggested the Transcendental Unit because I thought that it would allow students to approach social justice, but even after getting the students excited about it, I abandoned the unit. This type of oscillation and control negatively impacts students in the classroom.

This study looked at teachers, and it offered a snapshot of what diverse students deal with on a daily basis in America's schools. Storying aided me in my ability to relay my findings. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) acknowledge that "…meaning is constructed through story"

(p. 63). I have created meaning through my autoethnographic writing and the different writing genres I used.

Three themes emerged from the study, and I triangulated these themes using multiple points of data from this study. The themes gleaned from this study were as follows:

1. White teachers are trapped by a worldview which allows them to see their reality—a reality which reflects their backgrounds and understandings as they have been formed via socio-cultural interactions.
2. When white teachers are inclusive of other cultures, they impede the progress that might occur from such inclusiveness by poor planning or by other life events that interfere with their ability to include students.
3. The subtle relationship between power and assessment allows white teachers to use their power over racial minority students.

These themes were related because dominant culture power in the classroom impacted all aspects of the classroom. These themes also answered my research questions.

What is the Impact of White Privilege on Racial Minority Students in a High School Setting?

Even though I have taught for ten years, I found myself participating in the practice of being in love with my own whiteness. I taught Dewan as I believed that every student should be taught. I wanted him to learn, and as I focused on *Maus I,* a graphic novel, which moved me when I first read it in 2000, I saw Dewan become uninterested. In my mind, there were no *Holocaust* texts which accurately portrayed the atrocities of the Holocaust more than this text. Day after day, he put his head down, and he slept. He was not rude about it; he just did not care about the graphic novel. When I thought of the reasons why this was the case, I remembered that I loved comic books and graphic vignettes growing up. Reading the Sunday comics were my

weekly ritual. I saw the *Calvin and Hobbes* strip by Bill Watterson comes to its conclusion, and I mourned the death of Watterson's characters and their eventual sacrilegious resurgence on the back of Chevy trucks. Sequential art was intertwined with most if not all of my earliest memories, and though many of my students loved these texts, Dewan--and I have to admit that I do not even know if the young man could read—resisted this type of reading. I was too self-absorbed in my own teaching to realize this fact at the time. I loved the book, and other students have loved it in the past. Dewan should have loved it, too.

My line of thinking among white educators is problematic. By adopting this pedagogical posture, I demonstrated a lack of caring for Dewan and his interests. Ultimately, I was so obsessed with my first reading of *Maus I* that I assumed all of my students should feel the same way. Dewan was not alone in his disconnection, and I realized this facet of my own teaching as I reflected on the lesson in a memo. Other students, a few girls of different races and some boys as well, hated reading the text. Depending on the sequential panel set-up of the page, I, too, had trouble at times reading the graphic novel. At times, graphic novels can be confusing to readers as following the sequences of the panels if often difficult to determine. Since the book is told through Speigelman's animalistic anthropomorphization of Jews, Germans, Poles, and Americans, a couple of students struggled with the fictional nature of talking cats and mice. Even though all of the Jewish characters were mice, my students also had problems telling who the different Jewish characters were. In retrospect, I see that this was a legitimate concern, and it was sometimes time consuming to explain in class that one mouse has a cigarette and the other does not, for example. Having read the book a dozen times, I had forgotten my own frustrations with the text ten years prior to their reading of the text.

The participants in this study adopted similar pedagogical stances. Sean, Sarah, and John superimposed their privileged worldviews on their own students (Kumashiro, 2004). This preference was most noticeable in the texts that were read and in their actions and interviews. Interestingly, Sean, Sarah, and John all mentioned that they were highly successful students in schools. They had learned to play the game of school. As a result, they collectively discussed earning scholarships, and Sean and Sarah, in particular, talked about having defining literacy experiences, which shaped who they were as literary minded individuals. Doors opened in high school and college because they were part of an institution that favored their backgrounds and their highly literate home lives. Picower (2009) notes how these privileges of whiteness reinforce the institution, while uphold the social capital that is whiteness. In this study, all of my participants have benefitted from this racist system of privileging in America. I am no different. I was groomed by a similar set of opportunities, and I was the recipient of open doors throughout my years of schooling. These open doors are the institutional markers of white privilege.

A word about control

Through privileging what they thought important, Sean and Sarah brought this same worldview to their own classrooms. Sean, for example, wanted to bring students to a point where they loved books like he did, and Sarah desired the quiet classroom that was structured and focused on the standards that she thought were so important. Both of Sean and Sarah also demonstrated their own immersion in whiteness when they taught their classes, focusing on their own stories as well as their own experiences. For these teachers, students' stories were often not an important part of the curriculum.

Sean did mention having his students read their narratives, but I never witnessed this act. Outside of the every six weeks Sean's students wrote personal stories, he quarantined student stories, and even though he encouraged this type of interaction every six weeks, he did not make it consistent with his every day teaching. I suspect that he and Sarah both disliked the messiness which accompanies such interactive behaviors in the classroom. I know I often feel this way. Clearly, all three of us sought control of our classroom. For the white teachers in this study, this type of worldview reflected beliefs and attitudes which assumed the white dominant narratives of earned scholarships and academic mastery were the norm.

Inclusiveness in the classroom offers students an educational buy-in which might change the classroom milieu and decenter the power of the teacher (Sheets, 2009). In a less overt manner, control also impacts the choices that teachers make. Sean and Sarah chose on different occasions to retain control of their classroom by not acting. Sean's lessons were often cogent examples of inviting students to explore different texts. They were inventive and often close to culturally relevant in their scope. What prevented Sean from connecting with his students was his lack of planning. Sarah was no different in this respect. Her preparation for her six classes often occurred before class started.

The results of their lack of attention to their teaching caused confusion among students, and it dismantled the ability of students to connect to the lesson at hand. I witnessed heads down in both classes on a daily basis, and I also observed countless off task behaviors from students in the form of talking, horse playing, and texting. In some ways these student behaviors are typical for high school students, but they also reflected a lack of involvement in the lesson. In this situation, the irony of teachers trying to keep control of the classroom environment empowered students to carve their own spaces. These spaces were distractions for the teachers when their

students were off task. In my own classroom, I see the roll of eyes and the texting begin when I discuss the Fireside Poets during the Romantic Period. The Puritan unit and other units that are less modern in their scope illicit this response from my students time and time again. Because I teach honors, I often expect these students to get over any boredom they feel, but as is often the case, my racial minority students place their heads on their desks.

Pointedly, Sean and Sarah lost students and created ultimately more stress for themselves by keeping control of their classroom. The self-absorption with whiteness bored students and separated students from self-recognition. *Antigone* and *Julius Caesar* are difficult plays in their own rights, but conventional teaching methods focused on plots and the time periods of each text disenchanted students who did not see a redeemable value in a plot for murder unless they can found a cultural or familial marker (Carpenter, 2000). Students acted out, talked aloud, and texted frequently in each of their classes during instructional time. The students were not focused. Admittedly, a myriad of reasons might exist for these unfocused behaviors, but cultural alignment through student assignments might have helped students connect to the activities of the classroom.

What was most disheartening about the above scenes in the classroom was the unwillingness of teachers to spend quality time outside of their own preparation time in the school building preparing for their classes. Repeatedly, Sarah and Sean struggled with preparation. Sarah even told me on several different occasions that she did not take work home, and Sean told me that he only planned before his classes started. Even though John mentioned that he and Sarah planned together, I never witnessed any type of meaningful preparation on either of their parts. All of the participants compartmentalized their work, and they acted as if schooling should be done solely at school. The longer I teach the more I have also adopted this

behavior. I have a few tricks I can pull out of my hat during any unit that fake my level of preparation, but these lessons are often fun and not inclusive of my racial minority students.

I find on a yearly basis that my students resist learning about African-Americans or other types of stories because they believe that they are forced to read them, and they do not want to submerge themselves into a different reality. I have tried in my practice to oppose letting the majority white populations in my classes decide for the rest of the class what to read, but it is a difficult task to continue to remain focused on this idea. The majority of the class often resists this idea. In the classroom, this type of thinking marginalizes other voices and gives credence to the dominant narrative which the teachers in this study already present on a daily basis. Planning multicultural lessons might help me think about better ways to incorporate more diverse materials in my classroom.

To What Extent do White Teachers Activate the Cultural and Familial Experiences Of Racial Minority Students?

My subjects struggled with cultural awareness. For the most part school wide initiatives which promote AYP subgroups are more about scores than students at Topeka, but these initiatives do call attention to diversity. Sean and Sarah acknowledged that this was indeed a focus of the school, but they did not focus on this edict. Sean believed that he was an expert in his field and that he knew what he was doing, and Sarah mentioned being so afraid of getting in trouble that she taught a multicultural novel to prevent her from being scrutinized by the administration.

Although I spent fifteen weeks in each classroom, I cannot tell if the choice to not teach about culture had something to do with their levels of comfort with culturally relevant material. Because we are poorly trained in this arena at Topeka, I believe many teachers are not aware of

the possibilities inherent in culturally relevant pedagogy. Denevi and Carter (2006) acknowledged that an issue can exist between white teachers and their knowledge of diversity. I witnessed this chasm in my subjects frequently, and as I conducted the study, I saw my own teaching fall prey to this lack of focus on diversity.

Even though both teachers were present within their particular classroom frequently, there were many days when they were absent or working on other projects in class while their students were working on lessons. In the co-taught class, I witnessed Sarah use John as a substitute teacher at times. Going through a divorce and remarrying in the same year, Sarah had personal business and phone calls to make to lawyers and to her ex-husband. Coupled with her absences, Sarah missed several days of the second semester with her students, and she left them with a John, who was critical of her lessons, but he rarely changed them. During one class, he even offered public criticism of Sarah, suggesting to the students that she left him with nothing to do. Even though he always suggested that they were on the same page (and Sarah claimed this as well), he did not know what was going in the class on a daily basis.

In a similar way, Sean interrupted his own classes with playful tangents which only garnered the attention of a few students, specifically male students. He rapped and laughed with these students—some were African-American and some were white—but he never addressed the females during these tangents. Several students of both genders placed their heads on their desks during these times or they started talking to their neighbors. Sean's distractions were particularly long, and he often never found the train of thought from which he departed. Whether he rapped, danced, or highlighted his own blues band, his distractions in the classroom were frequent.

Writing

When this study began, I thought I would be writing and documenting tenth grade teachers as they prepared students for the GHSGWT. In the review of literature for this dissertation, I discussed writing as relevant and as a culturally responsive avenue for students. I also wrote about critical literacy and how important all of the above are for teachers who desire to foster an equitable classroom focused upon the principles of socially just pedagogy. Over the course of the fifteen weeks for this study, I witnessed little writing within the classroom and no preparation for the GHSGWT.

Because writing can be so integral to student development and to cultural awareness (Carter, 2006), I was disappointed in the writing instruction I observed in Sean and Sarah's classes. Writing instruction generally revolved around assignments that were prescriptive, as was the case with Sarah's poetry assignment, or they were culturally relevant compositions which were abandoned, as was Sean's writing assignment about characterization. I did hear Sean at one point discuss with his students an author's circle and discuss how he has his students read compositions within that circle that were personal and reflective of student experience. He said he always enjoyed this activity with his students; however, I never actually saw the students read these compositions.

Much of the classroom time that I observed between the two classes did not indicate that self-discovery was the norm in the classroom, and while culturally relevant compositions offer opportunity for a constructive environment to develop, my sense of the classrooms was that content delivery by the teacher was the focus of the majority of the lessons. Freire (1970) and others (e.g., Castango, 2009; Lynn and Jennings, 2009; McLaren, 1989) note the importance and richness of this delivery model being a dialogue between teacher and student; otherwise, the

relationship between teacher and student assumes that culturally the student has little to bring to the classroom.

Re-assessing assessment

Sarah often confused students with assignments which were unclear. Students could not tell how they were being graded or the manner they were being graded because they did not have exemplars or rubrics to guide their decisions. Sarah often asked students to do creative projects and then retested them because she was unhappy with the results. Instead of redoing the original project so that students can learn what an "A" looks like, she demonstrated a lack of trust for the project idea and tested her students in a more conventional manner. Even though she claimed that this gave her a full picture of her students, and it did to some degree, I believe she was more comfortable with the traditional assessments. The traditional methods allowed her to quantify student learning. Although this type of assessment is a valid way to measure student growth, it is often impersonal, especially the way she utilized this assessment. Multiple choice questions and definition questions give students little room to share their connections to the literature.

Surprisingly, Sean, who asserts his belief often to be independent, did not let his students exercise that same belief. Much like Sarah, his assessments were impersonal and difficult for students. While reading texts that were thousands of years old, Sean's students found it hard to connect their writing assessments to the test. They looked for ways, but struggled with writing about the themes of *Antigone* because they were never encouraged to connect their own stories to the text. Even though Sean enjoyed the student products he got from the *Antigone* unit, he felt like he wanted more in-depth responses from his students. As creative as a multi-genre paper is, the way Sean explained the assignment was not culturally relevant. The depth of student response which Sean lacked stems from their lack of connection to the text. He did not show any

awareness of this possibility. In fact, I was disappointed that he did not seem willing to reflect on his assessments for *Antigone*. He placed the blame on the students, and it is noteworthy that he did not find his own choices in the unit problematic.

For both Sean and Sarah, the impersonal assessments that administered to their students suggested an agenda which confused students. Both teachers retained power over how students were assessed and removed student choice from the equation. While students may not have been able to articulate clearly what choice means, they knew informally at least that the assignments were confusing, especially in the case of Sarah and John when the teachers were not even sure what the requirements of the assignments were. When teachers retain power and cannot communicate with their students what the assignments are, students feel helpless. When rubrics are not available and student models are not prevalent, this feeling is exacerbated because students are graded by an invisible set of guidelines. Sarah was guilty of the invisible criteria on several occasions. Even though Sean did often show student work, he never provided a rubric, so his students were unsure of how they were being assessed as well. Nartgun (2009) notes that students should be prepared for assessments and learn from them as teachers learn about student progress during post-assessment analysis. Otherwise, Nartgun continued, students find it difficult to know how to progress in a classroom. I am guilty of this as well. As a teacher, I often have great ideas for the students to work on, but I frequently do not show them examples or demonstrate to them how they will be graded. Any times my students have asked me for a rubric, and I have told them I will print one out tomorrow. Sometimes I do follow through with this, and sometimes I do not.

In educational circles, not preparing students for the assessment they must take is inexcusable, especially in the assessment environment which schools are forced to maintain in

the testing reality. As far as principals and department heads are concerned, assessments allows teacher to review progress and to individually adapt a student's path of study so that the student can meet the standards. When students have to enter into an assessment blindly, teachers do not get an accurate picture of what the student can do. Additionally, students do not know what to expect from the assessment and struggle with what to study or what tasks need to be accomplished.

Socially Unjust Pedagogy

I was surprised at the impact that the above factors had on the classroom and the lack of administrative support that these students received. If I were to ask any of the students in the class what they think of their teacher's absences or of the teacher's playfulness in class, I believe I would hear that some of the students say they loved the lack of work that was completed at times because of these distracters. Furthermore, if I were to poll the administrative staff about what types of teachers these teachers were, I would also receive mostly positive or encouraging answers. Even though Sean was on a professional development plan during the course of this study because he did not turn in paperwork, he is generally regarded by his colleagues as a strong teacher. Colleagues also bestow the same honor on Sarah. John's lack of work ethic is no secret in our department, but he still receives annual evaluations that are primarily positive. I am a former teacher of the year at Topeka, and the same could be said about me.

My concern as a researcher is that a brilliant opportunity for white teachers is not being seized in the classroom. The result of this lost opportunity is that the longer the profession of teaching refuses to acknowledge the importance of highlighting curricular choices which are culturally relevant the longer we do an injustice to our students. This injustice makes no room for students as they exist in relationship to the dominant narrative of schooling (Gainer, 2010). It

is socially unjust as it is to assume that student empowerment is not an important variable to success.

During my observation period, I witnessed controlled discussions about race and storying by the participants, but I rarely witnessed any of the participants in this study asking students to consider who they were in the larger societal dynamics at work in schools. Students exist in these environments of school and are often aware of the white heterogeneous narrative by which they are defined. Discussions about how schools marginalize and discussions about how critical literacy empowers students tilt the power dynamic closer to what is equitable for students are essential. Racial minority students benefit from classrooms that allow this type of empowering.

Administrative critiques

There is another side to this story as well. Just as racial minority students are not receiving administrative support from administrators who look out for them, teachers are not receiving administrative support either. There are no professional development opportunities for teachers in this area of the school improvement plan. While the school improvement plan is designed for teachers to focus on minority students, this plan does not provide the necessary tools for veteran teachers to maintain this focus. At Topeka, if the school improvement plan suggests that the focus for the upcoming year is to prepare African-American males to have higher test scores, then a proper implementation of this plan requires teacher development.

In the larger culture of a school, the administrative tasks typically involve paperwork and discipline. At Topeka, these tasks rarely involve visits to the classroom except for once a year during the evaluation process. In this way, the administrative team, Sean, Sarah, John, and I were co-conspirators. At Topeka, there is no real accountability for teachers who fail their students or

for administrators who fail their teachers. Currently, no one holds teachers accountable for their actions with racial minority students.

During my observation period, I never saw an administrator walk into either of the classrooms I observed. I observed administrators call into the room and ask for students to come to their office for discipline referrals and parking violations. There is no state standard, school standard, or a personal standard which requires teachers to reach their racial minority students in the classroom. Even though the teachers who I observed had quality relationships with most of their students, they refused to recognize the positives in the student's culture and home life. Administrators should share the blame here to some degree, for Page (2003) notes administrators must pay attention to how teachers incorporate multicultural and culturally responsive teaching because it improves the achievement of all students in the classroom. During my observation period, I never witnessed an administrator interested in the classroom effectiveness of teachers who taught racial minority students.

Significance of this Study

Much has been written and researched about whiteness and its pervasiveness in school system, but to my knowledge, most of this has been written by theorists who do not inhabit a classroom. Unfortunately, the focus in the literature has been on preparing pre-service teachers for the field of education. This narrow focus does not address the veteran teachers or professional development for white teachers. Even though teachers often receive multicultural training during professional development seminars, few school districts ask their white teachers to assess their own feelings about diversity. By doing this, school districts undermine the true power of reflective teaching.

Such actions on the part of a school district or on the part of an individual are socially unjust and unethical (Applebaum, 2004). All students need a voice and a chance to interact with the curriculum in an environment which encourages their exploration of curriculum and ultimately themselves. This study highlighted the ethical implications of school districts across American, which operate under the umbrella that students can be forced into ideological submission through testing initiatives and policies which place culturally different students at risk to succeeding. For change to be implemented, school districts need to address the negative impact that white privilege has on culturally diverse students.

This study was also significant because I used autoethnography to discuss my classroom and acknowledge my own failures. At the risk of sounding too egocentric, I relayed my ability to pull the wool over the eyes of my own school district and my own students. I was a decorated teacher who failed his students, specifically his diverse students, because I did not see beyond my own ideological and cultural preferences. Teachers can fail their students by not acknowledging the importance of different cultural perspectives and diversity frequently, but the literature does not document the magnitude of this occurrence. Through my authoethnographic entries, I broadened the literature base and the struggles of teachers who desire to do right for their students but fail them. If nothing else, I discussed how teachers who are perceived as excellent often struggle with the racial minority students in their classrooms.

This study is significant in yet another way, too. The primary focus of this study was teachers, but administrators and national policymakers need to be addressed as well. I know the mistakes I make in the classroom in terms of curriculum are often a result of the outside pressures I feel to perform. The testing environment of high schools in America is more than ever a pressure cooker. Teachers and students feel these pressures because of administrative and

legislative guidelines that often have state governments becoming involved in local schools. In Georgia, for example, the state government can take over a school if it has not met AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) enough times. AYP statistics are never far from any faculty meeting or from the thoughts of any teacher that I know at Topeka. These external pressures impacted all of the teachers in this study. This study highlights the degree that such pressures have not encouraged teachers to pursue more culturally inclusive lessons.

Teacher leaders need to be developed and trained to understand the importance of using cultural relevance in the classroom. At Topeka, teacher leadership is more of an informal affair, but in truth, book studies and professional development within departments rarely occur. Certainly focusing within departments on issues involving race and power in the classroom would go a long way to helping teachers understand the racial minority students in their classrooms. For this to occur at Topeka, administrators and department heads would have to take the lead.

Implications for Policy

To date, educational policy is driven by standardized testing. The legislative passing of NCLB (2001) set a tone for accountability and for measurable results that has echoed at the state level and boards of education. Although the impacts of this legislative mandate have made teachers and school-level administrators pay attention to students of diversity (or sub groups as they are more often discussed), the climate created by NCLB has intensified the Foucaultian surveillance that states, school boards, and even teachers utilize to monitor students.

Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiatives (2009), a monetary reward system, which gives points to states for meeting certain goals set forth for improving education and educational opportunities, might be more popular among educators than No Child Left Behind. Even though

it is early in the lifespan of the Race to the Top's legislative mandates, Race to the Top uses an index where schools and students are still judged by test scores, but teachers are judged more comprehensively on their ability to teach students the standards via a new teacher assessment tool. Still, a healthy dose of skepticism is necessary because evaluators may need to be trained on how to evaluate white teachers (or any teacher for that matter), especially in terms of their effectiveness with racial minority students. The problem often with federal education mandates is often not the spirit with which the laws are created, but instead, the problem generally occurs with the individuals in charge with implementation. If teachers and administrators are not taught how to recognize the impact of whiteness in the classroom, little will change as a result of Race to the Top.

At the high school level, AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) scores revolve around the graduation tests, especially in the state of Georgia. Thus, African-Americans and any other group of ethnically racial minority students who are large enough to be considered a sub-group by the state become the focus of the school. In the case of Topeka High School, African-Americans became part of the school improvement plan and part of the discussion during faculty meetings and data retreats.

While this intense focus is important, it has more drawbacks than advantages. First, African-Americans, as a determined sub-group, become the focus of teachers and administrators for a full academic year. At Topeka, for example, we have cram sessions and data retreats to talk about strategies. In this regimented data focus, something become lost, and that something is the individual, the students whose name is not even acknowledged at the data table. Regrettably, the focus of the school becomes passing the test while disregarding the individual who exits its boundaries into a workforce or a collegiate atmosphere. What good is a high school test score in

a world where certain skills are necessary for success? A second problematic issue with AYP scores is that African-American students or other racial minority students who do not meet the numerical requirement to be a counted sub-group are discarded. In a school, for example, with fewer than forty minorities in an ethnic category or fewer than 10% of the total student body the racial minority sub-group is not counted and therefore unimportant to the school. I have witnessed this time and time again at Topeka. The travesty of this business model is that only certain students count for a certain time period.

From a policy standpoint, every student should be treated in an equitable manner and assessments for schools and teachers should focus on the progress of every student without the ability to label schools and teachers as failures. I have seen how pressure and resentment build in students when they are forced to take another pre-assessment or when teachers are forced to send their students to cram sessions because they have been labeled by the school as likely to fail the test. There is a human component behind standardized testing that cannot be forced into the mediocrity that standards enforce. Legislative mandates take no notice of this human component.

Moreover, policy must address this human component and provide broad frameworks for teachers to grade their students based upon rigorous, but flexible, standards. Putting power back into the hands of the teachers will not, of course, remove concerns about teacher accountability, but it will be a step in the right direction. In order to address concerns about teacher accountability, policymakers should look at reasonable ways to assess teachers and to train them. As I found in this study, teachers do not always embrace racial diversity, and many, especially the ones in this study, found themselves unwilling to change. Such stubbornness may not be removed by legislation or policy, but teachers should be held accountable for some of the poor

pedagogical practices I witnessed. Every classroom has its share of inequities and it may prove difficult to change the minds of teachers and to awaken them to the richness within every student, but the research (e.g., Madsen and Mabokela, 2002) supports methods which might embolden teachers and give them firm frameworks for incorporating diverse teaching methods which support the diversity of learners in their classrooms.

The difficulty that schools and school systems face is the pressure that NCLB provides for students, teachers, administrators, and local school boards, but this kind of high stakes accountability where teachers and students are coerced into teaching against their desires promotes distrust among students and teachers. Jones (2004) suggests that a balanced model of accountability would work better for schools. In his model, Jones explains that the principles to a balanced model should include student learning, the opportunity for all students to learn, a responsiveness to parents and the community, and an organizational capacity which is robust enough to accomplish the goals set out for the school. Moreover, Jones notes that the state should not enforce rules, but rather, it should provide resources for schools to be effective. This decentering of power could be effective if administrators understood the needs of their racial minority students.

Reflections and Limitations

This study challenged me in many ways. On one hand, I balanced my time and looked into the classroom of my colleagues. Having two individuals for the case study proved interesting. I felt from the outset that it was important for me to compare these teachers against because this would allow me to see similarities and differences. I juxtaposed these teachers and saw similarities and differences, but in terms of teaching practice, I found that the participants in this study were firmly rooted in western ideas and the dominant narrative of this country. On the

other hand, I also had to dig into my own teaching and look at my students, specifically the ones that I have failed. I had to examine the way in which whiteness impacts my own practice. This was eye opening and difficult at times because I found that I was indeed part of the dominant culture and I, too, was not immune upholding the dominant narrative of the country.

There were limitations to this study. The most obvious limitation for this study is that I am white and subject to the limitations of my own cultural upbringing. Additionally, this study did not look at students. Student voices would have been particularly useful in me verifying my observations about the teachers, and I think more importantly, students would have added texture to the study, especially since student voice is so pivotal to the classroom and any study about cultural relevance. Other limitations include the way in which I conducted this dissertation. That is, my teaching schedule only allowed me to observe my participants one hour a day. Thus, in any given week, I saw my participants for two and a half hours, and I only saw them during 6th period, which was my planning period. I did not know how other times of the day or other mixtures of students affected their use of white privilege in the classroom. Other ancillary duties, which took up time, made it difficult for me to even get in the classes of my participants minimized by observation time as well.

Future Research

Future research must consider the paucity of professional development opportunities for teachers as well as administrators. Equally important are the perceptions that administrators and teachers have of their racial minority students. Other possible choices for research should look at teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds to see if their pedagogical behaviors are similar to teachers from white backgrounds. This type of research would provide feedback on how teacher from different background adjust or do not adjust their pedagogical choices based on race, and a

study of this type would greatly inform the body of research. As mentioned earlier, much research has been conducted on preservice teachers, but little research has been conducted on active teachers or veteran teachers. Even though my study informs this body of research, more could be done. Moreover, future research along Helms' continuum would provide more in depth research to discuss how white teachers interact and understand their racial minority students. Helms and others with similar research aims provide a rich framework to enhance the conversation about public schools and the racial minority students who inhabit public schools.

Conclusion

I began this study as a student willing to learn about how white teachers affect the racial minority students in their classrooms, and in the process, I learned how I am part of this impact as well. I also learned that teachers often deny that the students in their classrooms are different culturally. Schools, school boards, and state-level administrators agree in that they produce policies and testing mandates that reflect a lack of attention to diversity. The research, however, on whiteness and its effects on the institution of schooling suggests a different picture. The achievement gap, for example, has not significantly changed in the last decade, and while schools are getting more diverse, the teacher population is not. This demographic inequity causes other social justice inequities, which have bearing on students' learning and self-perceptions.

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APPENDIX A

CODE LIST

Assessment: Student

Assessment: Racial minority Student

Assessment: Abandoned

Assessment: Standards

Assessment: Differentiated

Background: Family Privilege

Background: Extra-Curricular

Background: Academic Privilege

Background: Educational Environment

Background: Religious Beliefs

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Pedagogy: Lack of Planning

Pedagogy: Family Literacy

Pedagogy: Teacher Connect

Pedagogy: Teacher Conflict

Pedagogy: Student Disconnect

Pedagogy: Student Underestimated

Student Activities: Writing

Student Activities: Group Activity

Student Activities: Listen

Teacher Challenges: Students

Teacher Challenges: Outside Pressure

Teacher Effects: Unaware of Minorities

Teacher Effects: Racial Ignorance

Teacher Effects: White Privilege

Teacher: Reflective Practitioner

Teacher: Professional Development

Teacher: Storyteller

Teacher: Connect

Teacher: Student Empowerment

APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION TABLE

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	x	x	x	
x	x		x	x
x	x		x	
	x	x		x
	x		x	
x		x		
x		x		
x	x		x	x
x		x	x	x
x			x	x
x		x	x	
x				
x	x			x
		x		x

APPENDIX C

DATA TYPE TABLE

	Sean	Sarah	John
Observations	13	13	14
Interviews	4	6	1
Focus Groups	3	3	0
Documents	7	6	0
Reflective Journals	3	3	0